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The Democratic Republic of Congo: the shift from Colonialism to Post-Colonialism through the Lens of Non-State Actor

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Introduction

« Ce qui est grave, c'est que l''Europe' est moralement et spirituellement indéfendable ».

« What is serious is that 'Europe' is morally, spiritually indefensible »
Aimé Césaire ([1950] 2001, 32)

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of Congo's independence, and more recently in June 2022, the King of Belgium delivered an apology, stating that "*this regime was that of an unequal relationship, in itself unjustifiable, marked by paternalism, discrimination and racism*" (Al Jazeera 2022). The DRC has been experiencing significant internal and external turmoil over the past three years, with a complex interplay of factors, both recent and historical, contributing to the instability. Currently, the country is facing a rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis, with civilians suffering the direct consequences of intensifying violence in the eastern provinces. These conflicts have affected numerous regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo for a period of no less than three decades. The armed conflicts in the country have their origins in the early 1990s, when the 1994 Rwandan genocide resulted in a significant influx of refugees into the DRC.

In this dissertation, the historical analysis will conclude with the event of the Rwandan conflict. What will be taken into analysis is the previous periodization, encompassing both colonial and postcolonial era. The roots of the dynamics of today's Congo, considered as a 'failed state', are deeply embedded in the historical period under consideration, namely the era of colonization and the tumultuous process of decolonization. The Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to grapple with the lingering consequences of its colonial past, that delineated its borders, exploited its territories, and subjugated its inhabitants. Independence ultimately culminated in the overthrow of the government and the ascent of a dictator who remained in power for over three decades.

The dissertation will thus encompass these three distinct periods: the era of colonial Belgium (1908-1960), the period of independence and the ensuing crisis (1960-1965), and the dictatorial regime of Mobutu Sese Seko (1965-1997). During this historical period, an analysis will be conducted on the impacts of two non-state actors, specifically, religious missions and enterprises. The objective of this research is to examine the relationship between these two entities during the colonial period, their impact on the independence movement, and their ability to endure in the post-decolonization era.

The historical progression of the nation, marked by a succession of forms of exploitation, initiated by slavery and followed by colonialism, led, in turn, to the era of clientelist development

agendas. The underlying structures of extraction have persisted in new configurations despite the end of slavery and colonialism being pivotal moments in Congolese history (Marriage 2021). In the DRC, these continuities are particularly acute, as the country's vast territory and mineral wealth, combined with extreme violence, have only exacerbated the impact of these enduring forms of exploitation. However, this history, as unique as it is, is part of the larger picture of the devastating effects of a colonial system that victimized an entire continent, albeit in different ways and forms. Indeed, although the memoirs of Congo bear strong resemblances to those of other African countries, this dissertation aims to analyze some very peculiar features. These are represented by an extremely complex and interconnected relationship between three entities, starting with the state, alongside two non-state actors, namely religious missions and business groups. The choice of examining these two actors stems from the fact that they both constitute two fundamental players in the dynamics of the Congolese state, within the colonial and post-colonial era. They respectively enjoyed a considerable degree of control over territory and people's lives, a level of influence that could only be overcome by the colonial state itself.

The category of non-state actor offers a particularly useful framework for addressing the nature of religious missions and business groups. The term "non-state actors" (NSAs) is an umbrella category encompassing a wide range of entities, including nongovernmental organizations, multinational corporations, private military organizations, the media, terrorist groups, and various other movements and organizations (Higgott, Underhill, and Bieler 2004, Chapter I). A distinguishing feature of non-state actors is that they do not formally exercise power over a specific population or formally control a territory, in contrast to states. Nevertheless, they may possess a base of members, employees, or sympathizers and wield considerable influence, occasionally even more so than a state (Wijninga et al. 2014, 144). In the context of the NSAs under consideration, which include Christian missions and business groups, the term 'transnational actors' is likewise applicable. In any theoretical discourse on NSAs, the Catholic Church occupies a distinctive position because of the size and variety of actors and interests within it (Josselin and Wallace 2001, 41-42). More accurately, they are regarded as transnational religious actors, of which both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches are key examples, because of their significant role in transnational exchange and influence through missionary activity (Haynes 2009, 293). The second non-state actor under account in the study is the business groups. Multinational corporations are regarded as NSAs that have taken advantage of globalization and the global multipolar world to build up capital and develop a global reach (Wijninga et al. 2014, 146). A necessary clarification is that an NSA does not have formal control over territory and does not exert formal power over, or on behalf of, a particular population. This does not mean,

however, that it does not have a constituency of its own. Consequently, a non-state actor can sometimes exert influence, in some respects, even more than a state (Reinalda 2016,75).

This dissertation offers an overview and analysis of the complex relationship between the three actors, namely the State and, precisely, colonial administration; Christian missions, both catholic and protestant; and lastly, financial groups and, largely, colonial enterprises framework. The colonial administration constituted the foundation of this triangular system. It was within this structure that the right to exercise control over the indigenous population was formally recognized. The Catholic Church was officially acknowledged as having a unique role to play in the realm of moral guidance and the education of the colonized population. Finally, financial institutions were granted unrestrained discretion in the management of resources of paramount importance to the colonial administration. According to Valentin Mudimbe, these three entities symbolize the structural underpinnings of colonialism in Africa, characterized by the domination of space, the reformation of indigenous mindsets, and the restructuring of local economies (Mudimbe 1988, 15).
The research questions I am proposing to answer are bifold. Firstly, my analysis aims to explore the interrelation between state-missions-enterprises in the colonial period, observing their degree of collaboration and complicity as well as instances of conflict or collusion. Secondly, this study attempts to investigate this alliance's impact on the decolonization process and its modalities of resilience during the following dictatorial rule.

The three key actors will be studied with the period of Belgian colonialism (1908-1960), which was officially initiated on 15 November 1908, forming the point of departure. References to the preceding rule of Leopold II (11885-1908) will be made during the discussion on the colonial period, given its significance in two respects: firstly, it marked the inception of the Congolese colonial experience; and secondly, it established a system that the Belgian state would later adopt and expand upon in a considerable degree. The periodization will conclude with the gradual dissolution of Mobutu Sese Seko's regime in the late 1990s. However, the period between these two historical events, namely the independence of 1960, will be of particular significance.
The selection of a broad historical period is driven by the necessity to encompass the three periods in question in order to address the subject matter comprehensively. The Belgian Congo period is pivotal in observing the establishment of the alliance between the state, Christian missions, and financial groups, assessing their degree of intensity and identifying contradictions and contrasts. The investigation will ascertain if and how these interactions influenced the development of the Congolese political consciousness, and, subsequently, played a role in the process leading to independence.

Finally, the study seeks to explore the impact of decolonization on the actions of missions and businesses under the subsequent Mobutu Sese Seko regime. It will examine their resilience during this period of significant political transition and analyze their contributions or resistance to the prevailing system.

This dissertation employs a qualitative research design, relying on an extensive body of literature on the topic. Given the broad temporal scope of the analysis, the consulted sources range from early authors of the first half of the 1900s to contemporary scholars, ensuring both historical depth and contemporary academic perspectives. The research adopts a correlational approach, seeking to examine the relationships between three key actors, namely state, missions and enterprises, while also assessing their impact and role in the decolonization process and the transition to autocratic rule that followed. By analyzing patterns of collaboration, complicity, conflict, and resilience over time, this study aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intertwined dynamics that have shaped both colonial governance and its enduring legacies.

To ensure a well-structured analysis, the dissertation is organized across multiple levels while maintaining a clear temporal framework. Each chapter follows a tripartite division (colonial, independence, and postcolonial period), allowing for a historical perspective that captures both elements of continuity and change. More precisely, the present study is grounded in historical, socio-economic, and political research perspectives. The investigation of the relationship between the state, the missions, and the enterprises is founded upon the observation of their historical and political evolution, with particular attention to their ties with the colonial state in the first instance, and the autocratic state in the ensuing period. The very observation of how this dynamic underwent transformations during the dictatorial period is relevant in order to understand the continuities and discontinuities in the control and influence exercised over the various levels of Congolese society. The rationale underpinning this approach is to discern the extent of the influence of these actors within the local context, encompassing both cultural and economic dimensions, and to analyze the impact of this influence on the independence process.

The examination of governance centers on administrative structures and shifts in political authority, revealing the mechanisms through which control was exerted and maintained. Religious missions are analyzed in terms of their cultural and educational influence, considering their role in shaping societal norms, fostering both compliance and dissent. Meanwhile, the study of corporate enterprises takes a socio-economic approach, investigating their effects on labor conditions, economic dependency, and their embedded relationship with state structures.

The first chapter provides an overview of the historical context. The analysis will center on the period from Belgian colonialism to the post-colonial era. I will initially focus on the forms of control exercised by the Belgian Congo, analyzing the centralized colonial administrative structure, the *Force Publique*, the impact of the world wars, and the subsequent emergence of an educated middle class. The chapter later covers the formation of national sentiment and political parties, leading to a hurried independence in 1960. The government, with Lumumba as prime minister, quickly collapsed after his death, resulting in political instability and the 'Congo crisis' during the First Republic. In 1965, with the establishment of Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship, marked by corruption and repression, the country was renamed Zaire. Notwithstanding the support of Western powers, Zaire experienced disastrous cultural and economic reforms. The narrative then addresses the end of the dictatorship, which was influenced by the influx of Hutu refugees from Rwanda and led to a war that ultimately toppled the regime.

The second chapter goes into more detail, focusing on the role of religious missions and examining the complex interrelation between church and state in the Congo from the colonial to post-colonial era. The church, both catholic and protestant, played a key role in evangelization and the 'civilizing mission'. The chapter outlines its internal modalities and divisions, its widespread territorial presence, and its role in education linked to its contribution to the formation of a national consciousness. It also examines the tensions with both the Belgian Congo and the Mobutu regime, where a complex interplay of cooperation, conflict, and compromise characterize the dynamics.

Finally, in the third and last chapter, within the same time frame, I will delve into the role of business groups, examining the extent of state control over them and the dynamics of resource exploitation. The *fil rouge* that will run through the chapter, as an emblematic thematic example, will be the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* company. The topics covered include the working conditions and economic discontent, as well as the relationship between the educational system set up by the missions and its correlation with economic development. The evolving economic relations between Belgium and the Congo are discussed concerning the strategic maneuvering at the dawn of independence and Katanga's controversial secession event. Finally, the chapter concludes with a look at the economic challenges and the contentious resilience of businesses in the face of Mobutu's nationalization policies.

The objective of this paper is to examine a particularly intricate historical period from a perspective that diverges from the conventional approach. Although the thematic literateur gives prominence to the United Nations and the United States, this analysis places non-state actors, such as

religious missions and enterprises, in the spotlight. Through the narratives of religious missions and financial groups, I sought to provide the reader, and myself, with the opportunity to gain insight into a subject that possesses the capacity to accurately depict the anatomy of the state. This perspective illustrates how, through interactions with the population in the form of religious practices, teaching, and management of the labor sphere, these actors transformed the day-to-day habits and practices of the Congolese population. Approaching history from this perspective reveals how historical change is the result of complex interactions, ranging from the local to the global level. Thereby, the understanding of historical reality becomes enriched and nuanced. This approach fosters a more comprehensive and informed understanding of global dynamics and the role of great powers within the broader context.

Chapter I

From Colonialism to Post-colonialism: Gained independence, Unfulfilled Hopes

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with a population of 102.3 million inhabitants, is the largest country in sub-Saharan Africa and the second largest country in Africa. This country has a particularly tragic history, whose repercussions are still evident today, making the DRC (in)famous for its continuous internal conflicts, which turned the country into a state of enduring fragility. The origins of the DRC's instability lie in a history of exploitive colonialism, post-colonialist Western interests, and neighborhood countries' wars, which turned the region into a regional and international competition arena. The richness of the country led to the harsh and ultimately bloody extraction of valuable resources for Western countries' profit and ignored the welfare of the African people. Slavery became an integral part of the colonial system, with forced labor stemming from the immense need for manpower in extraction industries, which rendered the population fragile, uneducated, and incapable of self-governance. Undoubtedly, the colonial era left a permanent mark on the whole African state system and the new states arising in Africa after decolonization are, territorially speaking, nearly identical to the former colonial states. The case of the Congo is no exception, as independence found the Congolese ill-prepared to organize and lead the state.

A large part of the tensions and conflicts arose, and still arises, from the fact that the borders of colonial states were drawn based on European political interests rather than considering the realities of the African context. Thus, the ongoing internal and external conflicts, rooted in ethnic tensions and historical contingencies, have undoubtedly always been influenced by European involvement (Wesseling 2015, 248). However, the years between 1908 and 1997 are crucial for understanding the origins of these conflicts. This time frame has been selected as it exemplifies the fractures and divisions that have marked Congo, shaping its identity of severe instability as a 'fragile' or 'collapsed' state.

This chapter will provide an overview of the historical narrative of the nation, encompassing the period from the annexation of the Congo Free State by Belgium in 1908 to the collapse of Mobutu's Zaire in 1997. However, an initial digression will be made on the evils of King Leopold II's

private management of the Congo, as crucial to understanding the reasons that led to Belgium's takeover of the management of the colony, and to understanding to what extent the hoped-for change for the improvement of Congolese society was actually implemented. The second part will be entirely devoted to the critical years for the nation's fate at the time of independence, which marked the end of the collective aspiration for emancipation that was embodied in Lumumba's figure. The orchestrated and tragic death of Lumumba resulted in the establishment of a government that enjoyed the protection and approval of Western countries, namely the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. The subsequent decades are examined in the final section, which analyses the characteristics of an authoritarian regime that only partially achieved its societal transformation ambitions but ultimately collapsed at the outbreak of the First Congo War.

1.1. *Congo as a Colonial Property*

The Congo inherited by Belgium in 1908 was a territory devastated by the exploitative practices imposed by Leopold II and by the resultant diseases. Its depopulation was dramatic, and the communication infrastructure was virtually nonexistent. Belgium did not change much of the policies imposed by Leopold II, maintaining a fairly centralized system, yet with a shift to being less military and more civilian in composition, moving from brutal methods to a more predictable bureaucratic operation. However, economic coercion continued, although forced labor was eased. Despite this, significant changes were made in terms of transport and social infrastructure during the years of Belgian rule.

1.1.1. *The Scramble for Africa: a Brief Overview of King Leopold II's Rule*

The end of the nineteen century marks a period of imperialist activity of European countries, such as Belgium, Germany, Great Britain and Portugal, which claimed almost 80% of the continent territories, sadly going down in history as "the scramble for Africa". This process ultimately culminated in the Berlin West African Conference of 1884 [1], when African countries' boundaries

[1] The Conference was held between 15 November 1884 and 26 February 1885. At the Conference took part 14 countrues, namely, Germany, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Spain, United States, France, Britain, Italy, Holland, Austria-Hugary, Portugal, Russia, Sweden and Norway, and Turkey took part. In The History of Congo, Didier Gondola expands on the rules established at the Conference, highlighting three key principles: (1) free trade in the Congo River basin and estuary, (2) open navigation on the Congo and Niger rivers, and (3) protocols to follow when claiming new

were redesigned by European colonizers, aiming at the creation of manageable political units, without taking into consideration economic development, ethnic cohesion, and natural resources' allocation (Cornwell 2004,55).

The downfall of the Democratic Republic of Congo started within this imperialist expansion, which resulted in the King Leopold takeover of the country[2] (Rutz 2018, 2) and the proclamation of the "Congo Free State", as the personal possession of Leopold II, the monarch of Belgium. The King's interest in the Congo Basin could have stemmed from explores' reports on its incredible potential natural resources, included important materials, such as ivory, copper, and rubber, causing the state to become a focal point of significant disputes. Notwithstanding, King Leopold convinced the other powers, such as Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, and even the United States of his philanthropic intentions (Hochschild 1999, 64-65).

On the other hand, other countries believed that he was a fair compromise since they did not want a major country to take possession of Congo (Ewans 2017, 88). Clearly, the main reason behind this decision was the countries' necessity to maximize their chances to have a Congo characterized as a free-trade zone. To cover the costs of his investments in expeditions, lobbying, and public relations, Leopold aimed to maximize the profitability of the region. Production became a matter of life or death. King Leopold looted the country's natural wealth with the aid of the Belgian army and governed the local population with brutality, introducing forced labor[3].

The rule of Leopold became absolute since his actions were not restrained by a parliament or a government[4]. Consequently, the scale of atrocities became so severe that it is reported that half of the population perished from forced labor[5], starvation, and a range of diseases, passing from approximately 20-30 million to 8.5 million in 1911 and 10 million in 1924, in accordance with official census data (Hochschild 1999, 233).

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territories along the African coast. For more information: Didier Gondola (2002). The history of Congo. Westport: Greenwood Press.

[2] Furthermore, the rationale considered the possibility of a division of the continent that could circumvent the potential for conflict along its frontiers between the colonizers, primarily Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, and Belgium. O'Ballance, Edgar. 1999. The Congo-Zaire Experience, 1960–98. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2.

[3] According to the King's perspective, the Congolese population was deemed insufficiently developed and therefore necessitated the use of force and violence to maintain organized governance. In "King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa", by Adam Hochschild, is present a clear description of the inhumane conditions of the Congolese.

[4] Throughout the years of his reign over Congolese territory, which lasted 23 years, Leopold himself stepped on Congolese territory, pursuing a regime of long-distance slavery for the sole purpose of enrichment. He disregarded his international legal obligations to ensure freedom from slavery and to foster free trade in the Congo Basin.

[5] Adam Hochschild demonstrated that this form of slavery became deadly because of the correlation between three main factors, namely murder, malnutrition, fatigue, and exposure, and lastly illnesses (smallpox and sleeping sickness, for example). Hochschild, Adam. 1999. *King Leopold's Ghost : A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Mariner Books, 225-234.

The human labor, implemented for the extraction of minerals[6], mainly ivory, was directed under the *Force Publique*, a military force established by Leopold in 1888 and initially composed of permanent military Belgian officers, who conducted a regime of terror among the population[7]. Therefore, even if formally the army was assembled to maintain public order, it performed as a brutal tool of coercion. Leopold promises were neglected not only from his spurious spirit of deliverance, but even from the free-trade pact he made according to the provisions of the Berlin Act.

He proceeded to establish a "royal-controlled economy", which entrusted few powerful trusts, such as the *Société Generale de Belgique* (SBG) and the *Baron Empain* banking group (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 21-22). The wealth Leopold extracted from exploiting the Congo generated a significant flow of capital, yet it ultimately fell short of resolving his financial troubles. By the 1890s, he was heavily in debt, sparking tensions with the Belgian government, which began pressing him for greater financial transparency[8] (Rutz 2018, 12).

Moreover, rumors about the brutalities of Leopold's management in the territory began to spread throughout EuropeThe shocking details of the abuses in Congo began to emerge through the publication of several reports, most notably by the Congo Reform Association (CRA)[9], the first major human rights campaign of the twentieth century (Wesseling 2015, 168-169). Even novelists, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, joined the campaign. In his book "The Crime of the Congo" in 1909, referring to Belgium he wrote:

"*Her colony is a scandal before the whole world. The era of murders and mutilations has, as we hope, passed by, but the country is sunk into a state of cowed and hopeless slavery. It is not a new story, but*

[6] As a matter of fact, by 1870, the Congo was provided nearly 85% of the global ivory supply, a highly coveted resource of the era, since it was a material commonly used by Europeans for ornamental purposes. Not only ivory, the killing of the elephants for their tusks, and the collection of wild rubber were the main source of revenue for the King.

[7] The resource collection system destroyed the poor workers, who, to escape the atrocities of the harsh conditions created by the collection of rubber, ruby and copal, either fled or refused to collect the full amount. In both cases, the consequences were floggings and brutal murders, the setting fire to entire villages and the destruction of entire crops to starve the rebellious villages. Likaka, Osumaka. 2009. *Naming Colonialism: History and Collective Memory in the Congo, 1870–1960*. University of Wisconsin Press, 35. Gondola's analysis showed that terror took a wide range of forms. The Force Publique used kidnapping, rape, and blackmail to compel villages to provide substantial rubber quotas each week. The other method for achieving rubber quotas was to cut off the hands of those who did not meet the quota, so that the weight of the chopped hands could fill in the gap.

[8] In fact, the Congo Free State's debt was the highest in Africa and the colonial rule became the cause of today's Congo's enclave economy. However, exploitation had winners, which were clearly not the Congolese, but the King, the shareowners, and the banks. The exports from Congo Free State increased from 11.5 million francs in 1895 to 47.5 million in 1900. Rubber exports rose from 580 tons to 3,740 in the same years. Renton, David, Leo Zeilig, and David Seddon. 2013. *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance*. London: Zed Books, 37-38.

[9] According to Hochschild, the Association failed to address the foundational causes of these atrocities, not questioning the colonial and imperialist underpinnings of the exploitative system. Instead, its focus remained on the reformation of colonialism. Yet, they fought to preserve the humanitarian concern and, particularly in the United Kingdom, Congo started to be regarded with growing interest and, at the same time, growing alarm. Hochschild, Adam. 1999. *King Leopold's Ghost : A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Mariner Books, 304-306.

merely another stage of the same. It is not a new story, but merely another stage of the same story. When Belgium took over the Congo State, she took over its history and its responsibilities also." (Doyle 2019, 5)

Ultimately, the atrocities committed in King Leopold II's Congo Free State became known beyond the African continent, exerting pressure on Belgium to compel the King to relinquish control of the territory to the Belgian state. The Belgian rule lasted more than twice as long as the Congo Free State, spanning from 1908 to 1960, however, the colonization methods remained almost unvaried (Gann 2015, 149-155).

1.1.2. *The Belgian Congo: a 'Model Colony': Administrative and Security Framework*

The Congo Free State became the Belgian Congo on 15 November 1908, after more than a year of negotiations between the King and Belgium. Despite Leopold's efforts to retain control over the colony, including promising a series of administrative reforms, the increasing pressure and criticism from the international community made it no longer possible. The Belgian government asserted that it had transformed the Congo into a "model colony," (Vanthemsche 2012, 71) governed by a colonial charter and supervised directly from Brussels. The Belgian rule, however, did not distance itself from the atrocities of his predecessor.

Although slavery decreased, Congo was still considered a source of state revenue. It is evident from the fact that the structure of the state was not substantially changed. Belgium kept the same amount of control, through the *Force Publique* and multinational corporations that were exploiting the region[10], gaining around 61 million francs from personal properties and Leopold's previous stocks (Gann 2015, 201). The only exception stood at the top of the pyramid, whose place was now held by a colonial secretary, a body that ultimately reported to the Belgian democratic cabinet and was not directly connected to Leopold's private officials. The cabinet was directly responsible for the colony.

The new structure, together with other arrangements related to the institutional reform of Belgian rule, was contained in the Colonial Charter of 1908, which granted the king legislative authority. The Belgian Parliament placed limitations on the powers of the monarch in addition to assuming control over the colonial budget. Among those, it was established a joint exercise of the

[10] A study by Gann and Duignan concluded that five Belgian companies controlled the majority of Congo's economic activity, leaving no form of autonomous control of the economy.

legislative power over the colony between the Parliament and the king. Moreover, on 25 October 1908, the Ministry of Colonies was created, which, as the echo of Brussels's power, had administrative and legislative powers. During Belgium's rule over Congo, twenty-nine appointed ministers of colonies succeeded until 1960, the independence year (Kisangani 2022, 63). The central government, placed in Leopoldville, was directed by a governor-general, who spoke on behalf of the king and hosted a government council, working as an advisory body (Leslie 2019, 10).

The territory was initially partitioned for administrative purposes into four provinces, and then into six in 1933 – namely Lower Congo (with the capital in Leopoldville), Equator (Coquilhatville), Orientate (Stanleyville), Kasai (Luluambourg), Kivu (Bukavu) and Katanga (Elisabethville) – each headed by a deputy governor-general with broad powers. Each province was then divided into districts. Under this provincial head, there were district commissioners, who ruled over a series of *territoires*, which was the name given to the basic unit of colonial government. Meanwhile, the number of districts was reduced from 21 to 15, and the number of territoires from 180 to 102. Albeit provincial boundaries continued to be quite stable in the following years, district and territorial boundaries experienced many modifications, mostly designed to accommodate sectional and tribal divisions, even though the extreme diversity of ethnic patterns did not always allow the implementation of this policy (Lemarchand 2023, 66).

This picture was complemented by the *Administration d'Afrique* (African administration) headed by chiefs, whose numbers proliferated (from 2,200 in 1911 to 4,000 in 1918) who, basically, were colonial collaborators elevated to that status (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 170). Within the *Administration d'Afrique*, there was the territorial *service*, which saw the categorization of ranks, where, at the top of the colonial administration, stood the *gouverneur général* (governor general), followed by the *gouverneurs de province* (provincial governors), at the provincial level. Below them were the *commissaires de district* (district commissioners) and the *commissaires de district assistants* (assistant district commissioners).

At the territory level, figured the *administrateurs de territoire* (territorial administrators) and the *administrateurs de territoire assistants principaux* (principal assistant territorial administrators). Lastly, at the lowest level, were the *agents territoriaux principaux* (principal territorial officers) and the *agents territoriaux* (territorial officers) (Dembour 2000, 17-44). In 1914, Belgium created advisory bodies at the central and provincial levels to guarantee coordination among the several layers of the administrative hierarchy. These bodies were initially composed of official members and have included unofficial ones since 1933.

However, it wasn't until 1947 that two Africans joined the *Conseil de Gouvernement*, and by the 1950s, the ratio of Africans to Europeans rose to almost fifty percent.

Moreover, the local organs introduced by Belgium only permitted restricted self-government initiatives, since African participation in local government in the districts had no effective decision-making power. The *conseil de chefferie* or *conseil de secteur* were judicial bodies, whose composition encouraged the presence of native authorities, under the instruction of the district commissioners. Their deliberative function was soon overshadowed by their jurisdictional function in the Orientate, later extended to other provinces, where they were officially transformed into indigenous courts. Yet, their primary function, as a matter of fact, was not to ensure the resolution of disputes according to customary law but to secure compliance with the administration's policy. However, since their creation in 1926, these bodies, having both judicial and executive powers, carried out many abuses. This situation led, in 1993, to the need to guarantee a better separation of powers, dividing the institutions into *tribunaux de chefferies* and *conseil de chefferie*. The latter, moreover, had limited powers that could easily be overridden by the territorial agent or the district commissioner, effectively revealing their limited role in contributing to national integration. An important reform was introduced in 1957, known as the Statut des Ville, which aimed at integrating African and European quarters in major cities like Leopoldville, Elisabethville, and Jadotville into unified administrative units (*villes*), and allowing African participation in urban governance through communal councils, based on elections. In 1958, the status of *ville* included Bukavu, Stanleyville, Luluabourg, and Coquilhatville.

This system stimulated the growth of parties, to the extent to which it was still authorized. Broadly speaking, the Belgian government was unable to build up a strong system of local government, even if they devised on paper political integration at the territorial level. Conversely, at the central level, the institutions were, essentially, a monopoly of European administration (Lemarchand 2023, 69-76).

The *Force Publique* (FP) was a key actor in the Belgian colonization period. Established in 1888 by King Leopold to occupy Congo basin and maintain order, it was responsible for the defense of the Congo and the preservation of internal law and order. In each unit, all the officers were Belgians and the Congolese personnel, which was ethnically mixed, only held lower ranks (O'Ballance 1999, 11). Brussels succeeded the CFS in commanding the FP army, essentially an undisciplined corps of soldiers roaming the countryside at the mercy of the territorial administrators, thus making them a grievance element for Boma, at the time the capital of the Congo Free State. At the end of 1914, the Belgian Ministry of Defense judged the capacity of the FP to be weak, nevertheless, the FP showed

some improvements through greater discipline among the ranks and the institutionalization of regular pay and weekly food allowances for soldiers. Therefore, the army became less dependent on pillaging and local requisitions of food (Gann 2015, 75-85).

A fundamental twist came with the outbreak of the First World War, which required the FP to transform itself into an external police force, precisely 11 days after the invasion of Belgium by Germany on 15 August 1914. In order to confront the Germans in East Africa, the Belgian government provided the colonial army with an autonomous command structure under the leadership of Charles Tombeur, who was the Deputy Governor General of Katanga.

In January 1915, the government decided to launch a combined military offensive with the UK against German troops in East Africa in April, whose implementation, however, was delayed by 16 months (Van Reybrouck 2014, 133). In addition, a second offensive took place, and Congolese troops also fought in Cameroon and Rhodesia. Under the command of its Major General Tombeur, the FP emerged victorious from World War I by defeating German forces in Cameroon (in 1941), Rhodesia (1942), and German East Africa (1916 and 1917). This victory served to safeguard the colonial borders in eastern Congo, and once the army returned home, its role was eventually once again limited to maintaining internal political order.

Although the army had undergone a degree of professionalization prior to the war, with an increase in training and a reduction in the number of mercenaries and socially marginalized individuals, as observed during the Leopold era, post-war developments saw a return to the practice of plundering the countryside. However, after the war a proposal to renovate the army, dividing it into colonial troops for external missions, and territorial police for internal security, was almost implemented. A similar one, dividing the FP in troops for territorial service for internal security and camped troops for external one, had more fortune (Kisangani 2022, 68-70).

By the end of the 1920s, the colonial army represented a new scale of social mobility for most Africans. This was due to the fact that the government enlisted a large number of married men, whose wives received a weak but regular food allowance. It also increased the recruitment of soldiers' sons to fill the ranks. Such policies reinforced the professionalization of the army, building clean barracks with clean water to accommodate soldiers and schools for their children.

Besides that, the FP acquired artillery, and mechanized units organized based on competence, and the army leadership began to train African *gradés* (senior soldiers) for more conventional military expertise. The state also incentivized a sense of responsibility and devotion, increasing their sense of belonging and honor toward the defense of the colonial flag. Finally, the state administrators sought

to strengthen '*l'esprit de corps*' with sporting events and public lounges. Soldiers became aware of the unicity of their role from the rest of the society (Kisangani 2022, 71-72).

Once again, with the Second World War, the FP's mission quickly shifted from internal to external protection after Germany's invasion of Belgium on 10 May 1940. During those years, the role of the Belgian Congo was crucial against the Italian troops in Ethiopia. Headed by Major General Auguste Gilliaert, colonial troops marched into Ethiopia to oppose the Italian troops. About 3,000 Congolese soldiers and 2,000 porters participated in the attack, which was won by the FP. (Van Reybrouck 2014, 183). Despite the absence of adequate remuneration for their services during the Second World War, the military still underwent a process of professionalization. However, many soldiers who had served in Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the Middle East experienced far better living conditions there and could not anymore accept the poor wages and the disrespect, triggering the first mutinies (Kisangani 2022, 74-75).

1.1.3. *The Economic Structure and the Social Dimension*

In October 1909, a reform was introduced to gradually open the Congo to free trade, allowing the Congolese to freely collect and sell their produce. The enforcement of burdensome taxes forced skilled workers to migrate to working areas, such as plantations, mining, railroads, harbors, and white residential areas (Gondola 2002, 113). The emergence of free trade increased the number of traders and sparked an unprecedented trade competitiveness that had two important consequences. Firstly, it led to a rapid increase in prices paid to African producers, and, secondly, it increased market competition[11] (Kisangani 2022, 135). The free trade reform differentiated the economic system from the former one, that involved labor as the form of taxation[12], which was then replaced by the traditional monetary form of payment. However, in 1917, forced labor (60 days per year) was implemented again in agriculture, especially for cotton cultivation, an industry where the capitalist system was perhaps the most brutal and illiberal.

[11] However, the privatization of many of the colony's activities dating back to the CFS, that broke the state monopoly of the Lopoldian regime, was in the hands of Belgian companies. The main companies were the *SG*, the *Empain group*, the *Cominière group* and the *Brufina group*, which remained dominant until about the 1950s.

[12] Differently from Leopold, the successor, King Albert I, even personally visited the Congo—a step Leopold had never taken — and expressed himself in favor of this reform. Ewans, Martin. 2017. *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe: Leopold II, the Congo Free State and Its Aftermath*. London: Routledge, 236.

Another decree in 1924 abolished the former one, introducing a new investigation procedure before imposing forced labor, taking into account the land resources, the number of healthy individuals, the transport networks, the ability to trade, the technology used in the fields, and so on. Later decrees reduced the number of forced labor days. Overall, the result of these colonial labor policies directed to keep agricultural production prices low, was an increase in proletarianization, the emigration of young people to the cities, and a demographic imbalance that unpopulated the countryside. The exodus of thousands of Africans from this industry was the cause of the stagnation and deterioration of African agriculture compared to the European plantation system (Kisangani 2022, 137-149).

This exodus was further encouraged by the increased demand for manpower for the mining industry (copper, diamonds, gold and tin), which, after World War I, began playing a significant role in the transfer of technology and the early industrialization of the Belgian Congo. Given that the resource-rich mining region of Katanga was distant, isolated, and underpopulated, labor had to be sourced from other areas. This migration of workers further impoverished large rural regions and contributed to the highly unequal development of the colony[13]. Furthermore, since the mines initiated a major flow of primary financial resources from Britain and Belgium, it was necessary to link regions with infrastructure in order to facilitate the export trade (O'Ballance 1999, 4). Therefore, to further develop this industry, it was necessary to invest in the sector, which led to several major projects undertaken in the early 1920s to connect the eastern mining corridor to the Atlantic coast. The high transportation costs made it unfeasible to ship copper and other heavy minerals as raw materials, therefore, metallurgical processes were introduced, giving rise to new industries.

These innovations marked the beginning of the first wave of industrialization in the Belgian Congo, which lasted from the early 1920s until the late 1930s, driven by copper extraction and related industries. The Belgian government conceived the idea of a "*grands travaux*" or "great works" program in 1921, investing huge capital in railways, ports and waterways, roads, bridges, and urban projects. The railway lines doubled, from 2,058 in 1920 to 4,215 km in 1930. The number of navigable waterways exceeded 13,000 km. The modern ports increased from six in 1908 to 46 in 1930 and the road system improved from 2,550 km in 1920 to 29,908 km (Kisangani 2022, 90). In a context where the capital invested in transport reduced the costs of other sectors, trade increased and the economy became more diversified.

[13] The intensive recruitment of labor for mines and other European ventures caused food shortages and outbreaks of famine during the initial years of colonial governance. Moreover, to counter prevent depopulation of rural areas, by the late 1920s, the Minister of Colonies had to implement a labor stabilization policy.

The importance of rubber declined, and different products, such as copper, became more relevant. However, Congo's growing economic reliance on copper proved detrimental during the Great Depression of the 1930s[14].

This economic crisis was followed by a huge increase in production between 1940 and 1945, since post-World War II, the demand for copper surged again, which caused great social and labor unrest in the Congo and many other sub-Saharan colonies (Gondola 2002, 86-87). From the second half of the 1940s, the difficult lives of the indigenous population began to improve, so much so that the last 15 years of Belgian rule were generally seen as positive thanks to the boost in production and favorable market conditions (Young 2012, 23-49)[15]. This enabled the emergence of a middle class that had slowly developed over the years, consisting of domestic servants, teachers, skilled artisans, and foremen who gained their expertise and competencies in mining and industrial enterprises. The majority of African historians agree that, without the shocks caused by World War II, the decolonization of Africa would have been delayed for at least another decade. The conflict spurred the European colonizers to bestow political participation rights on their African colonies, whose military efforts in support of the Allied forces had proved so fundamental (Gondola 2002, 127-128).
However, the facade of stability and progress hid a darker reality. Only a minority of the population was able to access education and integrate into European society, leading to the emergence of a distinct group of Congolese individuals who had undergone a process of social and cultural 'evolution', conforming to Western values and lifestyle. These individuals became known as the '*évolué*s' (Vanthemsche 2012, 30-31). World War II was in fact a decisive factor also in the emergence of a new consciousness in Congo. The African soldiers who participated in the war came back home with the awareness they had helped Europe eradicate the evils of racism.
Moreover, by coming into contact with one another, African soldiers realized the structural differences in terms of governance and freedom that their countries were experiencing. The mutual sharing of thoughts and experiences had deep political implications, and once they returned to their home country, the Congolese soldiers of the *Force Publique* became the impetus for colonial emancipation (Gondola 2002, 128-130).

[14] The copper industry was severely impacted by the crisis, leading to a significant decline in production due to falling copper prices. Imports plummeted by nearly 70% between 1929 and 1933, and the African workforce was also reduced.
[15] They witnessed a boom in mining and agricultural production, boosted by high prices on world markets; a sharp increase in public and private investment; the strong growth of the Congolese manufacturing industry; an improvement in the purchasing power of black workers; an influx of people into the urban centers; mass schooling of the young population, and so on.

The infrastructure of a state comprises not only transport and services but also social infrastructure, or human capital, which includes the education and health of the population. Civil society began to change slowly, with hospitals and transport infrastructure being built (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 50). To enhance human capital, the Belgian colonial state focused on primary education and post-primary professional schools to meet economic needs (Kisangani 2022, 240). Regarding education, people with a schooling background tend to be more productive in the modern economy, however, the spending on education in the Belgian Congo remained low, averaging only 2% per year during the entire colonial period.

As a matter of fact, Belgium, in line with its paternalistic approach, governed its colony on the assumption that Africans were children. Consequently, the government prioritized mass primary education over creating a small elite. From 1908 to 1925, no significant educational policies were implemented, as the colonial administration focused on providing low-cost labor for mining and plantations, importing qualified European personnel (Kisangani 2022, 115). Missionaries established a framework of schools, mainly controlled by the Catholic Church, which, thanks to its privileged position, strongly supported the civilizing mission and became a primary agent of colonial "civilization" (Gondola 2002, 81-82).

From a human rights perspective, the Leopoldian system was replaced by a regime that, although less brutal, continued to be oppressive. Adam Hochschild characterizes this era as Belgium's "Great Forgetting," as it overlooked the brutality of King Leopold II's reign in the Congo, portraying themselves as the benevolent and just rulers of Central Africa (Hochschild 1999, 292-306). Even if the change of emphasis passed from economic exploitation to benevolent paternalism[16], there was not a drastic change in the policies applied to the Congolese society. Moreover, as a result of the strict censorship and oversight exercised by the Belgian government, people's discontent found vent in occasional riots and religious movements that were ultimately met with repression. As in the Free Congo State, local authorities employed armed forces as a suitable solution to their problems, and only in 1959 did the government formally recognize Congolese civil liberties (Lemarchand 2023, 37). Belgian policy initially aimed to preserve existing traditional institutions, such as African chiefs, to use them as local leaders under the broader control of the colonial government.

[16] Belgian paternalism is evident if traced back to the 1952 decree on matriculation, which provided for the juridical assimilation of Africans who were able to show “by their upbringing and way of life” that they had reached an adequate “state of civilization.”[16] The underlying notion, as can be deduced from these words, was that to be granted equivalent rights and to be regarded as equally "civilized" as white European men, it was imperative to adhere to the same behavioral standards. Piron, P. and Devos, J. (1954). *Codes et lois du Congo belge*. 7th ed. Bruxelles : F. Larcier. p. 525.

However, this principle of 'indirect rule' was soon overruled, and the Belgian administration began to impose its laws and regulations. The same inconsistency is evident in Belgium's approach to the educated elite. For example, the 1895 decree, which regulated the status of 'civilized' Africans, was largely retained. In 1952, the decree on 'matriculation' acknowledged that some individuals had "emancipated themselves from their tribal conceptions" and thus deserved equal treatment to Europeans.

However, while the decree aimed to place the African elite on par with European settlers, it effectively reinstated the system established by the 1895 decree, making the Congolese choose between keeping traits of their traditional culture or benefitting from the same privileges Europeans enjoyed (Lemarchand 2023, 35-42).

1.1.4. *Political Awakening and the Elections*

In addition to safeguarding Egypt's sovereignty, the year 1956 marked a pivotal moment in history with the attainment of independence by Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia. This period also witnessed the initiation of the decolonization process across French territories in West Africa, Equatorial Africa, and Madagascar. Great Britain granted independence to Sudan and to its West African Gold Coast colony, which later became the Republic of Ghana. Additionally, national independence movements began to take root in Angola and Guinea-Bissau. Other factors that contributed to the political awakening of Congo can be traced to the 1958 All-African People's Conference, and the World Exhibition in Brussels (O'Ballance 1999, 6).

In Congo, finally, a democratic movement emerged, spurred by debates among the elite about the country's future, the opening of political spaces for African involvement and participation, and the strong impact of these changes on the broader population (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 81). In the meanwhile, unofficial Congolese political organizations were springing up. Between them figured the *Alliance des Ba-Kongo* (Abako), established in 1950 with the objective of safeguarding the Bakongo language and cultural heritage; the *Association des Baluba du Katanga* (BALUBAKAT), born in 1957 to foster unity among the Balubas in Katanga Province; the *Confederation des Associations Tribales du Katanga* (CONAKAT), which came to hold a significant influence in the southern Katanga region, particularly in areas where copper mining was prevalent; and, in the same Katanga region, the formation of the *Fédération des Association de Ressortissments du Kasai au Katanga* (FEDEKA) (O'Ballance 1999, 7).

In October 1958, the *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC) was born in Leopoldville. It was a truthful national movement, that supported peaceful independence, whose leader, Lumumba, will have a fundamental role in the independence struggle.

It must be acknowledged that Congolese parties were very closely linked to the nonpolitical organizations that predated them. Considering the incredible spread of nonpolitical associations in the postwar years, it is easy to grasp why this phenomenon resulted in the proliferation of political parties. Most came into being through a process of politicization of existing associations or because of splitting or regrouping them. This process inevitably influenced the framework, leadership, and purposes of the political parties, especially if the precedent organization was ethnically or regionally based. Often, they originated from messianic and nativistic movements, which probably spread in Congo societies due to the psychological tensions of colonialism. The restricted scope of organizational autonomy available to Congolese workers, together with the analogous constraints on educational opportunities imposed by the Belgian colonial administration, contributed to the politicization of ethnic and tribal identities. In the aftermath of the war, many tribal associations sprang up in the large urban areas of Congo. These associations brought together individuals from one or more ethnically related groups with the aim of preserving or strengthening members' identification with their traditional environment and improving their social, economic, and cultural status. Among the possible reasons, the lack of coincidence between ethnic and administrative boundaries, led to the emergence of political cleavages within the same ethnic community, recalling to their own traditional culture.

Moreover, the existence of social and political differences between rural and urban elements was aggravating the picture (Lemarchand 2023, 168-175). Clearly, the most powerful of all the tribal associations of Leopoldville was the Abako, whose founder was Edmond Nzeza-Nlandu, and, in Elisabethville, the Association des Balubakat. Another type of association that influenced the formation of political parties was the student associations, born in the interwar period. As can be deduced from their respective names (*Association des Anciens Elèves des Pères de Scheut*, *Association des Anciens Elèves des Ecoles Chrétiennes*, *Union des Anciens Elèves des Frères Maristes*, etc.), these were promoted by religious congregations to foster the Christian spirit of their members (Lemarchand 2023, 180).

Regarding Abako, the party was officially recognized by the administration in 1953, advocating for a future prosperous Bakongo and spreading a nationalist spirit. The origins of the

rivalry between Bakongo[17] and Bangala[18] can be traced back to 1955 for political competition reasons and evolved into ethnic nationalism. Abako soon became very active, spreading its activities from Leopoldville to Thysville, Matadi, and the rural areas and organizing activities with cooperatives, youth, and student organizations.

At the end of the year, Nzeza-Nlandu asked Joseph Kasa-Vubu to join the Central Committee of the Abako, since he was held in high regard due to his strong connection to Bakongo's traditional culture and his openness to certain Western influences. In 1956, Abako published its manifesto of *Conscience Africaine*, positioning itself as the vanguard of the 'anti-colonial struggle', continuously attacking the administration, and especially the *Statut des Villes*, for its persistent refusal to introduce free political institutions. Despite this, they participated in the elections, achieving a spectacular victory (Lemarchand 2023, 185-188). However, even if Abako constituted the most popular party in 1956, already in 1959 there were fifty-three different political groups officially registered, and, shortly before independence, the number increased to 120 (Lemarchand 2023,191).

The history of the MNC developed differently, starting as the result of the publishing of *Conscience Africaine*, with the aim of national unity and colonialism emancipation, with respect to social justice and equality of races. They advocated for a rapid democratization of advisory bodies and the accession to fundamental rights. with the change of leadership, from Ileo and Ngalula to Lumumba, the party acquired militant traits. In 1958, after assuming the leadership of the MNC's Central Committee, he reinvigorated the party and gave it a new impetus, thanks to his charisma and his oratorical skills. In the name of the need for the elimination of ethnic antagonisms for the sake of the common good, he opposed the strong impulse that tribalism had at that time. During one of his visits to Brussels, Lumumba sought to raise his grievances and thereby exploit the differences between Belgian politicians. His main concern was to establish contacts with other African leaders, to explore what kind of alliances could be forged, but mostly to secure the moral support and financial assistance of Belgian politicians. There, he came into contact with the entire Belgian political spectrum, whose ideological differences helped the African leader to secure ground. The next step

[17] The most powerful tribal federation was the Bakongo, a collective term used to refer to a number of distinct tribal groups that shared a common language. They were the dominant tribe in the region surrounding the Congo River, in the Lower Congo. In 1958, it is estimated that 1.2 million Bakongo lived in the area. Of these, approximately 340,000 lived in the French Congo, located to the north of the river, and another 350,000 lived in Angola, situated to the south. Moreover, it is estimated that more than 50% of the population of the city of Leopoldville were Bakongo. (approximately 20,000 individuals). Another prominent tribal federation, the Baluba, was situated in the northern reaches of Katanga province, with a significant population also residing in Kasai province.

[18] The Bangala were located in the Upper Congo. At the time of Leopold II, they were considered by the Belgians as more open. They spoke Bangala, a language within the Niger-Congo family. Bangala and Bakongo have been involved in armed and inter-ethnic conflicts in the Congo Brazzaville region.

was to widen the party's grip, which had hitherto remained confined to Leopoldville, successfully extending its influence into other regions (Lemarchand 2023, 197-203). With the approaching election date, Lumumba sought to establish the MNC as an inclusive structure within which sectional and ethnic interests would be represented, also through a series of tactical alliances with minor parties.

On 4 January 1959, a significant insurrection occurred in Leopoldville, which was repressed by the Force Publique. The riots of January 1959 were a turning point for the Belgian government, convinced that the proclamation of independence had become necessary. In January 1959, two official statements were issued, one from Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens and the other from the Crown, where they declared their intention to "lead the Congolese populations forward toward independence in prosperity and peace." However, according to Lemarchand (2023), the riots only represented a determining factor in using the word 'independence', however, the intentions were already existing before.

During the discussion at the 423rd NSC Meeting of the National Security Council, on November 5, 1959, it was stipulated a range maximum of four years for independence to be reached. Supposedly, the time frame established was needed for the Belgian government to settle its accounts in the colony. They prepared in order to transfer colonial public debts to the newly independent state, even though private Belgium investment in Congo amounted to $ 3.5 billion, the public ones were financed through loans on foreign bond markets. The first payments of the loans were scheduled to occur shortly upon independence and were projected to take up 23 percent of Congo's ordinary budget expenses (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 220). Accordingly, the Congo would inherit both power and debt with independence at the end of June 1960.

The multiplicity of political parties that had based their grip and social support on tribal elements caused political fluctuation, leading to the inability of Congolese leaders to conceptualize the promise of independence rather than in terms of ethnic reference. Recognizing the risk of 'tribal domination' in their approach, the leaders aimed to form alliances that could effectively counter this threat. Precisely amidst this extraordinary proliferation of parties and alliances, unrivaled not even among the most successful examples of multi-party systems, Congo was finally approaching its first national elections (Lemarchand 2023, 213). The elections took place in June, under the *loi fondamentale*, the basic law that, with its 259 articles, 7 titles, and 6 chapters, aimed to provide the newborn nation an institutional framework, until the drafting of a constitution by the Congolese chambers. Clearly, the basic law mirrored the Belgian political structure, not taking into account the incompatibility with a pattern of Congolese politics without parliamentary traditions.

The system envisaged a bicameral system, a cabinet responsible to the parliament and the division of power between the head of state and the head of government, with the former with limited powers, representing more a symbol of authority. The Chamber of Representatives was to be composed of 137 members, elected with universal suffrage, moreover, a system of distribution of powers between the central government and the six provinces was foreseen (Lemarchand 2023, 215-2016).

The political framework was so fragmented that the number of lists presented exceeded the number of seats available, with a great number of lost votes. If compared to the members of legislative assemblies in other African territories, the new Congolese elite was very young, with an average age of between thirty and thirty-nine, and showed a surprisingly low level of education (Lemarchand 2023, 229). The MNC emerged as the largest party but secured only 36 seats out of 137, representing 24% of the Assembly's seats. Abako emerged as the third-largest party in the Chamber. In the meanwhile, Belgium was trying to obstacle Lumumba's rise because his radical leftist tendencies were threatening a radical disarrangement of colonial-era economic arrangements. In accordance with the duties assigned to the Belgian Minister in the Congo, Ganshof Van der Meersch, on behalf of Belgium's King Baudouin, appointed Lumumba as *informateur*, to explore the possibility of a government of national unity. However, Van der Meersch subsequently supported Joseph Kasavubu, who was advocating for a federalist state, in forming an anti-Lumumba government.
Still, a strong opposition in the assembly supported Lumumba's right to form a government, despite Belgian resistance. (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 223). Therefore, On the 30th of June 1960, Congo became independent[19]. The MNC entered into political alliances, such as Abako, in order to form the government. The Abako leader was then appointed as president of the Congo, while Lumumba held the position of Prime Minister. The two leaders had opposing views on the very same independence movement, since Lumumba represented a more 'radical' figure and advocated for political and economic independence, whether Kasavubu could be affiliated to the 'moderates', the ones enjoying the Western democracies' support (Leslie 2019, 20).

[19] In Lemarchand, R. (2023). *Political Awakening in the Congo: The Politics of Fragmentation*, the author suggests that independence was the result of a rapid sequence of events, that can be viewed in three main *momentos*: (1) the development of nationalistic claims in Congo, (2) the settlers' reaction to the policies of the Belgian government, and (3) the role of resistance forces in the Belgian parliament.

1.2. *Independence, the Congo Crisis, and The First Republic (1960-1965)*

The Belgian Congo had one of the shortest periods of independence struggle in the history of African colonialism, starting in late 1958 and concluding in June 1960. The period between 1960 and 1965 is referred to as the "Congo crisis", which can be understood as a crisis of decolonization. The crisis ultimately concluded with the military coup of November 1960; however, preceding this, a period of intense political instability and civil war had shaken the country to its core (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 96). According to Didier Gondola, the transition from colonialism to independence failed because of a combination of factors, including the lack of reforms, the absence of an elite to run the administrative system, and the Belgians' influenced industry and private sector (Gondola 2002, 145).

1.2.1. *Lumumba's Fragile Political Balance*

As the previous chapter has shown, Belgian colonialism ultimately did not even contemplate a slow process of decolonization of its colony, nor a program for future political emancipation or the gradual granting of greater rights. The unavoidable consequence of the Belgian government's short-sightedness was that, when independence became inevitable, Congo found itself in a situation of a serious competence deficit.

One example of this mismanagement can be found in the lack of efforts to train leadership within the Congolese population. The lack of an education system other than that established and run by the Catholic Church, left the Congolese social fabric uneducated and unprofessional, and allowed the Belgians to continue to monopolize the upper echelons of the territorial administration. In January 1959, when Belgium began to take significant and rapid steps toward granting independence, including the announcement of both municipal elections and the first general elections for May 1960, the Congolese political parties were in their nascent stages, having only just begun to emerge around the same period. Among them was the *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC), which generally defended the unity and integrity of a centralized Congo, banning tribalism, separatism, regionalism, and federalism (Kimpianga 2013, 120). The elections for the Chamber of Deputies and the provincial assemblies in May 1960 revealed an extraordinarily fragmented political picture. Notwithstanding that, regarding the administrative elections, the most relevant position continued to be held by Belgians. (Macola 2021, 130-138).

This fragmentation and fragile stability achieved with a newborn nationhood, revealed its limits in the Congolese army mutiny, a week after Independence Day. This insurrection was just the beginning of what provoked violent turmoil and discontent within the country, which ultimately led to what is today known as the Congo Crisis.

In order to provide a comprehensive account of the circumstances that led to the assassination of the first democratically elected prime minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is essential to first examine the life and career of Patrice Lumumba in greater detail. Lumumba was born in 1925 in Onalua, in the territoire of Katako-Kombe in Kasai province. He completed his primary education in a Catholic mission school, and when he moved to Leopoldville where he worked as the editor of *L'Echo Postal*, the quarterly review of *the Amicale des Postiers*, contributing as well to other newspapers such as *La Voix du Congolais*, *L'Afrique et le Monde*, and the *Le Stanleyvillois*. Opposing racial, social, and economic discrimination, he adhered to Pan-Africanism, a political project that encouraged the birth of a single African independent State encircling all the sub-Saharan African regions. His postal clerk career was suddenly interrupted in July 1956, when he was arrested on charges of theft and sentenced to serve two years in prison (Lemarchand 2023, 200-201).
In order to realize his political project, he adhered the MNC in October 1958. In contrast to other African leaders supporting the establishment of a federal system, he was strongly in favor of a centralized Congolese State[20]. He was a great orator, and an eloquent speaker, with the ability to express the majority's concerns and the charisma to motivate them. In a Memorandum of Conversation Between the Ambassador in Belgium (Burden) and Patrice Lumumba, which dates February 25, 1960, the latter was described as follows:

> "Personally, Lumumba gave much the same impression in private conversation as he has in public appearances—a highly articulate, sophisticated, subtle and unprincipled intelligence. He seemed reasonably well aware of what his audience would be interested in hearing and of what would make a good impression on them, and showed considerable sophistication in general when discussing political aspects."[21]

[20] Klein, O. and Licata, L. (2003). When Group Representations Serve Social change: the Speeches of Patrice Lumumba during the Congolese Decolonization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 42(4), pp.571–593. doi:https://doi.org/10.1348/014466603322595284.
[21] Office of the Historian, Foreign Service Institute of the United States Department of State (1960). *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Africa, Volume XIV. Memorandum of Conversation Between the Ambassador in Belgium (Burden) and Patrice Lumumba*. [online] history.state.gov. Available at: https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v14/d97.

However, he had great power to counter his transformative efforts. The straw that broke the camel's back and led to the infamous 'Congo crisis' was the FP protest and subsequent mutiny, which began on 5-6 July in Lower Congo and Leopoldville and then spread to other areas (Macola 2021, 140-141). The event caused panic among the European elites on the territory, which suddenly left the country. The mutiny, on the other hand, forced the decision to proceed with the Africanization of the Force Publique, however, with the expulsion and then the escape of Belgian commanders, the army fell into chaos.

Not only did he suffer a mutiny of military forces in less than a week after the proclamation of independence, but his government was opposed by great powers, such as Belgium, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The official reason for Washington's distrust of Lumumba was his "extreme nationalism," combined with his clear willingness to approach the Soviet Union (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 90-95). During the Cold War, the intent of the U.S. was to prevent Soviet influence, while prioritizing access to the country's resources by offering military and financial aid to the new Congolese government. More concretely, the American were aware that the independence of Congo, and therefore of the rich region of Katanga, would have led to a strong depreciation of mining investments in the region. In fact, Katanga was in the southeastern region of Congo, and had a prosperous mining industry which had been established in colonial times. The U.S. knew that the Confederation of Katanga Tribal Associations (*Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga*, CONAKAT), whose leader was Moishe Tschombe, was pushing for a secession (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 22).

1.2.2. *The Katanga Secession*

The Katanga issue is central when analyzing the roots and the immediate catalysts of the 'Congo Crisis'. The secession of Katanga was not simply the result of fear of domination of one ethnic group by another but mainly represented the breaking point of a combination of historical, economic, and social forces converging in the same direction. Katanga, during the Belgian rule, enjoyed a particular administrative status, which already spread separatist feelings among its settler community. The region had a big representation of European settlers, with a fast-growing ratio of Europeans to Africans around 20.8 per thousand, as against 10.3 for the Leopoldville Province.

Due to the rich diversity and abundance of subsoil resources, the province experienced an explosive development in the post-war years. Between 1950 and 1957, the total value of mining production increased by 57%. The province's main source of income was the copper deposits, which were so

large and easy to access that they were described as a ‘geological scandal’. In addition, about 60% of the world's cobalt and an appreciative, though undeclared, share of uranium came from Katanga. Furthermore, it held a virtual monopoly on Congolese production of tin, silver, platinum, lead, palladium, and zinc.

The one operating in this richness of resources was the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK), founded in 1906. It was one of the largest producers of cobalt and uranium and the third-largest producer of copper in the world. Ultimate control over UMHK, however, was exercised by the *Société Générale de Belgique*, undoubtedly the most powerful of the five corporate groups that, until recently, dominated the Congo's economy. (Lemarchand 2023, 234-235). This relationship explains the strong Belgian interests in the region.

The elections of 1960 saw clashes in the region mainly between the two parties of the Conakat and the Balubakat, but none of them emerged as a strong winner leading to a precarious equilibrium. Moreover, other elements made the Katanga picture fragile, including the role played by white settlers in making the idea of secession economically attractive and politically significant. (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 244-247). Observing the mutiny of the Congolese National Army, Belgium wasted no time in leveraging the fragile situation to its advantage, and, during the night of 9 to 10 July, the Belgian troops deployed in Kamina, Katanga, and in Kitona, Basso Congo, were entrusted to take military control of the country's main cities. The troops intervened without the consent of the prime minister and with the partially valid justification of containing the violence that had spread throughout the country (Macola 2021, 141). Following the arrival of Belgian reinforcements in the Congo, a merely one-day interval after the initial appeal to the United Nations, Khrushchev issued a statement in which he accused the West of attempting to re-establish colonial control. According to Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto (2015), for some in the West, this represented the initial indication that the Cold War had reached the Congo.

Moise Tshombe declared Katanga independence the 11 of July. Starting from this moment the crisis escalated rapidly. Belgium's support for Katanga's secession led Lumumba to suspect that Brussels sought to reassert its control, with an attempt at re-colonization. Consequently, on July 13, he and Kasavubu appealed to the United Nations, urging the deployment of troops and military aid to protect the Congo from foreign aggression. Their request extended beyond merely restoring the central government’s authority. It actually stemmed from evidence that Belgian troops had entered Katanga, systematically preparing the region for secession with the clear goal of maintaining influence over the emerging state. In response, the UN Secretary-General convened a Security

Council meeting overnight on July 13-14. The resulting decision, contained in UNSC Resolution 243 of July 14, was enabled by Britain's and France's abstentions and by the support of by both the Soviet Union and the United States. It called for the withdrawal of Belgian forces from Congolese territory and the deployment of a peacekeeping force (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 225-229). Subsequently, the United Nations Operation in Congo (ONUC) was established with the objective of facilitating the withdrawal of Belgian forces and providing assistance to the local government in maintaining stability within the country. In fact, to avoid direct confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, the Security Council organized the most resourceful and extensive operation ever deployed by the UN, which reached a count of as many as 20.000 troops, plus a civilian personnel contingent (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 94).

However, Belgium refused to comply with the UN resolution. On 17 July, Lumumba issued an ultimatum to the British general commanding the Ghanaian contingent of UN forces, stating that if Belgian troops did not vacate the area by 19 July, he would request Soviet intervention. The rationale behind this statement was based on the UN's assurance to Lumumba that Belgian forces would withdraw as soon as UN troops entered the territory. Despite the arrival of UN forces on July 15, however, Belgian troops remained in place[22]. After several repeated demands, on 1 of August Belgians withdrew 1500 troops, ten days after the first resolution. On 7 July, the Belgian government announced the withdrawal of its military forces apart from those stationed in Katanga, where 2,000 soldiers remained for a further month (Macola 2021, 144).

The decision of the UN to deploy troops to the strategic region of Katanga, both prevented the risk of Lumumba seeking Soviet assistance, but also removed any justification for the continued presence of Belgian forces. It is evident that without the military, administrative, and financial support of Belgium, the region would not have reached the secession. However, even within Belgium, there were contrasting factions, both in favor and against supporting secession. Among the supporters, the UMHK was a particularly influential actor, seeking to maintain control of the rich mineral territory (Vanthemsche 2012, 96).

[22] The situation was intensifying, with France and Britain attempting to reinforce Belgium's argument that a withdrawal could set a precedent, endangering other foreign bases in Africa.

1.2.3. *The Tragic End of Lumumba and the Rise of Joseph-Désiré Mobutu*

Meanwhile, at the top ranks of the army, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu was gaining ground. Colonel Joseph-Desiré Mobutu, aged 30, had previously served for seven years in the Force Publique in the role of a junior officer. In 1956, he moved to Brussels to study and returned to Leopoldville to work as a journalist. Later, he became a member of the Lumumba's MNC and joined again the army as colonel after the mutiny (O'Ballance 1999, 30-31). He was promoted by Lumumba to colonel and chief of staff of the *Armée Nationale Congolaise* (ANC), in July. The ANC was the military body constituted by Lumumba in July, at the beginning of the Katanga secession. Western intelligence services identified Mobutu as the person able to counter the rise of Lumumba, who was viewed with great suspicion and fear since he might have dragged Congo into the Soviet area of influence (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 106).

Their choice was not disappointed. With the support of ANC forces, Mobutu suspended the parliamentary regime and entrusted the administration to a group of university students and technocrats, who formed the *Collège des Commissaires*. This body detained power for approximately one year, meanwhile, Lumumba was detained under house arrest since the beginning of September. He attempted to flee on November 27 but was soon arrested. Afterward, he was directed to Lubumbashi, the capital city of Katanga, and during the journey, he was tortured. Shortly after his arrival, on January 17, 1962, he was barbarically murdered[23]. A unit of the Katangese army, under the command of Belgian officers, was responsible for the assassination of Lumumba (De Witte 2002, 121-122). Not without justification, the Lumumbaists spoke of failed independence.

The assassination of Patrice Lumumba sparked widespread protests worldwide. In Shanghai, half a million rallied, while in Belgrade, demonstrators chanted in his honor, and President Tito denounced the killing. In Brussels, 30,000 people stormed the Belgian embassy, and for the same reason the Italian parliamentary sessions dissolved into chaos. In Warsaw, over 2,000 protesters forced the ambassador to flee, while protests erupted in Damascus, where Lumumba was hailed as a martyr (Govender 1971, 8-9).

Subsequently, with the establishment of the government of General Mobutu, the rationale for an independent Katanga ceased to exist. Tshombe was able to maintain his position until 1961, but with the growing influence of the Americans on the APFTE forces, the latter launched an offensive

[23] On Lumumba's assassination and the role of Western intelligence services, see Ludo De Witte (2022). *The Assassination of Lumumba*. According to De Witte there was not a direct U.S involvement in the murder of Lumumba. The assassination was endorsed by the Belgian government and secret service.

in 1962, resulting in Tshombe's ultimate defeat on 14 January 1963 (Macola 2021, 152). The collapse of the Katanga secession in January 1963 did not result in the cessation of the unrest in the Congo. Kananga's new constitution, which was adopted in 1964, mandated the transitional government to organize national elections and convene a new parliament, with the first priority being to elect a president. The race between the two principal candidates, Kasavubu and Tshombe, who was brought back from exile in 1964, did not yield the anticipated outcome. Following a period of political maneuvering and turmoil around the legislative elections of March-April 1965, a coup d'état was carried out on 24 November by 14 members of the army, who were subsequently designated as the "Companions of the Revolution". The following day saw the announcement that Mobutu would assume the role of Head of State, with the intention of maintaining the functionality of the parliament and other governmental institutions. (Young and Turner 2013, 49).

The provisional constitution of 1960 and the subsequent one promulgated on 15 August 1964 did not provide a definitive characterization of the system as pluralistic or unitary. It is evident that, in contrast to the colonial state, a considerable degree of authority was devolved to the provinces, resulting in the establishment of elected provincial governments. Nevertheless, the increase in the number of provincial units from six to twenty-one resulted in a significant weakening of central authority. This was accompanied by a loss of control over the allocation of financial resources and the management of the national budget, as well as over the administration of territories and the police forces deployed in the regions. Furthermore, the political conflict was characterized by ethnic tensions and social unrest, which created a need to address the heightened sense of insecurity and instability caused by ethnic mobilization. Consequently, the model of a strong nation-state proposed by Mobutu in 1965 initially did attract significant support (Young and Turner 2013, 41-43).

1.3. *The Second Republic (1965-1990) and Mobutu Sese Seko: a Cultural and Political Dictatorship*

Mobutu Sese Seko passed in September 1997 in Rabat, Morocco, where he was living in exile. He ruled over Congo for 32 years, making his name in history as the leader of a violent and corrupt dictatorship that was later overthrown in a civil war. The beginnings of the violent history of Mobutu Sese Seko's repressive presidency can be traced back to the bloody coup d'état of 1965, which led to the establishment of an authoritarian governmental regime. Mobutu Sese Seko brought back and echoed the terrible memories of Leopold II's absolute rule and the dehumanization of the African

people of Congo. The system established was characterized by a profound contradiction, between the purging of all colonial cultural influence and the enjoyment of considerable support from the United States thanks to the anti-communist stances taken by Mobutu. Stemming from the United States' support, recognition by some African countries and the majority of European Western countries followed (Gondola 2002, 163). Nevertheless, despite an initial period during which he was able to rely on substantial popular backing, he failed to secure the same degree of mass support and legal authority that Lumumba enjoyed.

1.3.1. *The Creation of the Zaire*

The Zairian State, according to Young and Turner (2013), was a replica of the Belgian colony, a mere extension of the legal and institutional framework of the colonial state. A new ideological discourse was introduced with the aim of justifying the regime's legitimacy, while a single-party system, theoretically monolithic in nature, served to reinforce the existing bureaucratic-military structure inherited from the colonial period. Despite the decline the state suffered from 1974 on, the international support and economic interests made possible for Mobutu to maintain his power. (Young and Turner 2013, 30). The regime Mobutu installed perfectly responded to Linz's definition of an authoritarian political system:

> "A political system with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones."[24]

The *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR) constituted the single-party apparatus, whether the zairism or authenticitè sought to constitute an ideology, leading to a strong political mobilization, which, however, cannot be classified as intensive. In *The State-Society Struggle*, Callaghy argues that the MPR cannot be regarded as an institutionalized political machine, on the contrary, it was just a propaganda element of the state (Callaghy 1984, 27). In Zaire, the mentality that Mobutu sought to cultivate among the population was characterized by a lack of complexity, coherence, and specific articulation. It was firmly rooted in a populist framework, which inherently aligned with conservative, hierarchical, nationalist, and state-centric principles.

[24] Linz, Juan José. 2000. *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*. Lynne Rienner Publishers, 159.

Generally, in the post-World War II era, the political discourse was predominantly shaped by two overarching ideologies, namely communism and liberal democracy. In this specific case, as in many autocracies, the *façade* of vague democratization disguised a system that did not fully align with the definition of a revolutionary mobilization regime, given its limited capacity for societal penetration. Despite the use of mass mobilizations, marches, plebiscites, and other forms of participation, dissent was violently suppressed. The inability to foster genuine mobilization and a sense of belonging to an ideology likely stemmed from the fact that the single-party structure did not emerge organically from the struggle for independence. Instead, it was established retroactively, partially merging with pre-existing apparatuses and partially serving purposes of "revolutionary" and "democratic" legitimization (Callaghy 1984, 30). He was able to create a state regime that had some resemblance to democracy, but was still based on the colonial infrastructure.

Mobutu's assumption of power marked the beginning of the end for the First Republic. The basic units of the Belgian administration were reimposed and renamed, from the Belgian “provinces, dinstricts and territories” Mobutu created the “regions, subregions and zones” (Kimpianga 2013, 38). He opted for a form of centralized administration of the State, reducing the number (eight) and the power of provinces and removing from office six out of the twenty-one governors in office, with charges of corruption. The legislative assemblies of provinces lost their powers and became consultative bodies (Leslie 2019, 32). The centralization of authority was not only asserted in relation to the institutional autonomy of the state apparatus; it also claimed control over a number of other spheres of influence, including colonial corporations, trade unions, student associations, and churches (Young and Turner 2013, 43).

Internally, the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR) was founded on April 17, 1967. It was the one party destined to rule the political, economic, and social life of the country through the systematic and brutal use of the security forces, especially the Secret Service and the propaganda media.

It is essential to highlight the role of the Secret Service within this context, since it embodied the most relevant coercive tool of the state. Formally named the *Agence National de Documentation* (AND), it was an heir of the Belgian colonial secret police, the Surete, which was used to control the civil population through a large network of informers. The AND, whose structure remained the same as Surete, was granted political autonomy and even enjoyed a large extent of juridical and financial autonomy. Clearly, these liberties gave them the power to freely torture and mistreat detainees in

prisons, many of whom had been arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned, making the Secret service a tool of terror and intimidation (Leslie 2019, 46-47).

On the other hand, the creation of the MPR was a gradual process, that occurred over a period of more than a year and started with the creation in 1966 of the *Corps des Volontaires de la Republique* (CVR). Their objectives were to promote national consciousness and to gather the population in the reconstruction of the country, through activities linked to the symbols evoked by its acronym: *conscience nationale*, *vigilance,* and *reconstruction.* The ideology of the movement can be described as a synthesis of nationalism, economic independence, and nationalization.

According to Leslie (2019), "*In political terms, "nationalism" was touted as an alternative to both "communism" and "capitalism*". The CVR self-identified as a vanguardist movement rather than as a political party until the moment it accepted the incorporation into the MPR (Young and Turner 2013, 186-191). Even though basic rights were guaranteed, all Zairians were declared members of the MPR (Article 8) and committed to supporting the revolution (Article 27). Moreover, Mobutu was given the authority to alter freely any provision of the constitution (Young and Turner 2013, 70).

The First Extraordinary Congress of the MPR was convened in 1970 and enacted a constitutional amendment that declared the party to be the paramount institution of the Republic, with the President representing its interests and authority. This amendment established the overarching authority of the party, with all other institutions operating under its guidance and supervision (Young and Turner 2013, 192). All the other parties were banned. Already in one of his first public declarations in 1965, he announced that for five years there would have been no more political party activities, since they led the country to its ruins, according to his words (Young and Turner 2013, 76). Furthermore, the centralization process of the state was pursued by reducing the number of provinces from twenty-one to twelve, with the assemblies of these provinces being definitively abolished in the 1967 Constitution. The Head of state was granted significantly expanded powers, while Parliament was effectively dissolved and remained so until 1970, when it was still relegated to a function little more than ornamental. (Young and Turner 2013, 58-59).

Provisions of the 1974 Constitution declared *Mobutuism* a constitutional doctrine, replacing Christianity. Mobutu explicitly drew a comparison between "Mobutuism" and Christianity, asserting that the role of the political commissioners of Mobutuism could be analogous to that of the religious theologians of the Church (O'Ballance 1999, 108). Among other things, clearly with the growing hostility of the Church, he announced the abolishment of Christmas as a national holiday, and that

religious education was going to be abolished and replaced by teaching Mobutuism (Callaghy 1984, 305). Substantially, Mobutuism was conceived as an ideology, however, rather than a coherent ideology, analysts mentioned it as a 'political religion'. It consisted of a cult of personality, trying to picture himself as the Father of his population, with a divine mandate. Mobutu elevated himself to a status superior to the state itself, with unlimited powers. The glorification of this political figure was praised at various mass meetings and marches organized by the party). These *marches de soutien* were held at all administrative levels and were organized including the participation of various groups of the society, schools, the military, workers, etc. Moreover, the administration had to ensure that every public building prominently displayed a visible picture of Mobutu at the front. Even though this forced ideology was not effective, they still attempted to persuade the population strongly through the media, mainly with the official press agency, Agence Zaire-Press (AZAP) (Leslie 2019, 35-43).
However, popular response was scarce. According to a study conducted between 1972 and 1973 near Lubumbashi, on a group of 250 people, only 25% were politically active, 38% were occasionally active, and 24% were not active at all (Callaghy 1984, 328). Even though this study was conducted at the pick of mass mobilization, the results already show a fragility and were destined to fall dramatically in the mid-1980s, where a growing skepticism was evident in the almost nonexistent demonstrations of support.

The international system was a crucial source of support to the Mobutuist state. The survival of the Mobutu regime has been significantly influenced by the support of pivotal states within the international system. The strategic economic and political importance of Congo made Western powers aware that, in order to take full advantage of its resources and geopolitical role, it was necessary to maintain its internal stability and geographical territorial integrity. Mobutu Sese Seko radically restructured his country, transforming it. He made sure his position was solid internally and abroad. This support has been particularly noteworthy in the cases of Belgium, the United States, France, and, to a lesser extent, Israel, Morocco, China, Italy, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and several African countries (Callaghy 1984, 205). In fact, he restored relations with Belgium, which he visited in 1969, by arranging financial and technical agreements and hosting King Baudouin in Kinshasa (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 115). President Nixon received him in the Rose Garden in 1970, embracing the virtues of his investments in the new Zaire, while Chairman Mao made a financial investment of 100 million in the Head of State in 1973 (Young and Turner 2013, 64).
Moreover, the *Forces Armées Zaïroises* (FAZ) received military assistance from Belgium, the United States, and France, which strongly contributed in terms of training and reorganization of the structure, and even from Israel, after Zaire re-established diplomatic relations in 1982 (Callaghy 1984, 209).

1.3.2. *The Economic Policy*

At the time of the Republic of Congo's independence in 1960, the country's economic outlook was encouraging. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) had an annual growth rate of 6% per year, reflecting the good level of industrialization and welfare services that the country had achieved. The average annual income was $680, the industrialization rate was 41%, and 40% of the budget stemmed from export revenues. Moreover, the water and transportation infrastructures assembled during Belgium's colonization appeared robust (Peta Ikambana 2006, 32-47). However, the promise of an African renaissance eventually yielded to a rampant economic crisis and weaved the threads of a complex network of corruption and fear.

The economic crisis arrived after a period of undeniable improvement in the economy when, on 24 June 1967, Mobutu implemented a major monetary reform, with the creation of a new currency, the Zaire. This reform was followed by a period of sustained economic growth for almost nine years, which was swept away by the subsequent nationalization policies. Specifically concerning the monetary aspect, it was in March 1976 that an agreement was reached between the government and the IMF on a biennial stabilization program, which was, nonetheless, a complete disaster and led to progressive currency devaluations (Young and Turner 2013, 278).

In the context of Mobutu's pursuit of genuine Zairean nationalism, the government undertook what allegedly was a pursuit of both economic sovereignty and economic development. Mobutu introduced a process of *Nationalization* of the economy in 1973, with a progressive *Radicalization* in 1974, putting under state control the industries, in particular the mining one[25](Macola 20211, 191). However, even though the nationalization of the mining sector increased the State revenues, on the other hand, it made prices more vulnerable to global market fluctuations. The so-called *Zaireanization* consisted in the confiscation of the branches of the economy, mostly small and medium-sized enterprises, left in foreign hands, but resulted in a complete disaster, being poorly conceived and implemented. The rationale behind this program could be linked to Mobutu's need to

[25] The famous *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK) was nationalized, without compensation, on 1 January 1967, since Mobutu perceived the company's economic power as a threat to his early nationalist image of greatness. However, shortly after, an agreement was concluded, stipulating that the raw minerals extracted by GÉCOMIN (subsequently renamed GÉCAMINES in 1971), the state-owned enterprise that had replaced UMHK, would be marketed by the *Société Générale des Minerais* (SGM), a subsidiary of the *Société Générale de Belgique* (SGB), the majority shareholder of UMHK. This compromise, which gave a reasonable contract for the management of mines to SGM and generous compensation to UMHK, made it possible for the latter to leave the territory of Congo without strong losses.

boost his image, consolidate customer relationships, and give to his small coalition of loyal customers access to free goods to compensate them for their loyalty (Kisangani 2022, 195). Even if the project was put forward as part of the independence process, it soon showed the government's real intentions, allowing only the political elites close to Mobutu to grab territories and enterprises for personal enrichment (Macola 2021, 191).

In August 1974, with the *Radicalization* program, Mobutu forced the new business owners, mostly targeting Belgian businessmen, to leave it and only keep their land and agriculture activities. In early 1975, more than 120 foreign companies had been nationalized by the state (Leslie 2019, 105-106). The first victim of these politics was the agricultural sector[26], however, The economic crisis was further exacerbated by the reduction in mineral production, which was the most affected area after the radicalization policies, mostly caused by the lack of an industrial policy and the failure to upgrade infrastructure (Peta Ikambana 2006, 34).

As is commonly known, a large part of Mobutu's wealth came from the financial support of Western powers, which offered Mobutu capital, supplies, and diplomatic assistance needed to maintain his authoritarian grip on Congo while fulfilling the West's Cold War agenda in Africa. Mobutu accumulated an incredibly large personal fortune, gaining a rank among the world's richest leaders and accumulating assets estimated to be worth $4 billion, an amount equal to the country's foreign debt. He owned properties in several European countries, such as Belgium, France, Italy, and Switzerland, with alleged estates even in Portugal, Spain, Senegal, Chad, and in the Ivory Coast (Kimpianga 2013, 37). Incredibly, despite the immense resources he received, he failed to provide the country with a stable economy (Gondola 2002, 171). Pervasive corruption and looting of national resources earned Mobutu's regime the nickname 'kleptocracy' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 142). The term "kleptocracy" is a fitting description of the Zaire. Furthermore, the practice of clientelist activities exerted redistributive pressures on members of the governing elite. Mobutu himself employed a portion of his personal resources to secure the loyalty of the upper ranks of the *Forces Armées Zaïroises* (FAZ), which was the new title assumed by the ANC in 1971 (Macola 2021, 196). Such elements aggravated the economic crisis, which stretched back to the 1970s but peaked in the early 1990s. The contraction of the economy, aggravated by the rapid decline of copper and the

[26] Small producers along with individuals with low incomes were most affected by the economic collapse, especially peasants who depended on crops like cotton, rubber, coffee, and palm oil for stability. Certain groups suffered significant financial losses as a result of decreased manufacturing of certain commodities. Loss of health insurance, deteriorating nutrition, and fewer educational chances for children in impacted areas made matters worse and seriously impeded economic development.

Radicalization measures, signified the conclusion of the previously favorable trajectory of the economy (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 121-124).

The external debt gradually grew during the years of the Mobutu regime, spanning from next to nothing to nearly $3 billion in 1975 and $3.5 billion by the end of 1977. In 1976, the total debt represented already more than a third of Zaïre's overall expenditure and 12% of its GDP. According to data from the World Bank, the country had approximately $800 million in arrears on its repayment obligations in the same year. Therefore, in 1976, Zaire was obliged to request debt rescheduling from its public and private creditors. Despite the temporary solutions found in the Zaire, progressively stricter conditions were imposed to comply with International Monetary Fund (IMF) prescriptions. By 1978, Mobutu had no choice but to accept these conditions, and both IMF's teams of oversee over the Banque du Zaire, and Belgian and French oversight.
This marked a significant retreat from the economic independence objectives set during the regime's first years (Young and Turner 2013, 71-75). Zaire was still able to negotiate concessions and debt rescheduling with the IMF, thanks also to the support of the United States and following austerity measures between 1980 and 1985. American support continued until the late 1980s, putting pressure on the IMF to accord Mobutu yet other agreements and accords (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 140-142).

1.3.3. *Failed State Penetration: the Authenticity Project, the Repression of the Opposition and the Spurious Democratization Process*

In conjunction with the promotion of the MPR as an institutional vehicle for legitimation, the regime sought to exert ideological legitimacy through the propagation of a myth, namely, that one of "authenticity." The *Authenticité*, the forerunner of *Mobutism,* was a concept that was unveiled in April 1971 substituting nationalism as the official party doctrine, and was identified in the Zairean people's awareness of the need to draw on their own resources, to retrieve their ancestral values in order to contribute to a natural and harmonious development process and the surge of a stronger sentiment of authentic Zairian nationalism (Young and Turner 2013, 208-211). In a typically organicist manner, Mobutu stated in 1973 that Zaire's political doctrine was neither right, nor left, nor center, but 'authentic'. Theoretically, Authenticity was an African-centered concept aimed at reclaiming the dignity and self-determination of the Zairian people by restoring their eroded African identity (Peta

Ikambana 2006, 24. Mobutu promoted a new identity rooted in African tradition and culture, fostering pride in heritage and rejecting the uncritical adoption of foreign ideologies (Bokonga Ekanga 1976, 55-72).

Despite the vagueness of these concepts, concretely, Mobutu committed himself to countering many elements of Western culture present in the territory. This was exemplified by the renaming of the country from the Republic of Congo to Zaire, on 27 October 1971, and the banning of the use of Western and foreign-sounding names (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 117-119). This concept was manifested by the redefinition of the naming of streets and neighborhoods, in the authenticity of the meals being offered up to the evening television entertainment. As a matter of fact, the names of cities of Belgian origin were changed – Katanga became "Shaba" and Léopoldville became "Kinshasa" (Peta Ikambana 2006,24-25). Not only cities, streets, and rivers, but even individuals' personal names had to 'convert', since Christian names were abolished, imposing traditional ones. During the period of colonial rule, it was a requirement for all citizens of Congo to undergo baptism and to be given a Christian name, in accordance with the European Catholic tradition, while the surname remained the family's native one. Following the policy of authenticity, Zairians reverted to using names with cultural significance and rooted in African tradition (Peta Ikambana 2006, 25). Mobutu himself adopted a new name, Joseph-Desire Mobutu, in place of his birth name, Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, which meant "irresistible warrior, who will go from conquest to conquest leaving fire behind." (Leslie 2019, 34).

This practice in particular was strongly resisted by the Church. Moreover, people were encouraged to eat traditional food, and Kinshasa's internationally famous music scene received significant state patronage. The same occurred with public art. Throughout the country, statues of figures such as Leopold, Stanley, and Albert I were torn down to be replaced by highly modernist depictions of workers, peasants, and abstract monuments that seemed to suggest an African response to Picasso or Zadkine. Every inhabitant of Zaire, from the very first morning, was immersed in this authenticité project (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 126). Traditional and authentic clothing was also encouraged, with the highest expression of it becoming the *abacost*[27], a uniform similar to the one Mao Zedong wore, which replaced the Western-style suit and tie. The abacost was not affordable for the impoverished, and it soon started to be viewed it as a sartorial symbol of class instead of as an expression of national identity (Young and Turner 2013, 117).

[27] Abacost is an abbreviation of the French "à bas le costume," which literally meant "down with the suit", that is to say the Western-style dress. The abacost was presented by propaganda as traditional African dress, but it actually traced a dress pattern from Maoist China.

Authenticity was a great success in many ways. It impacted almost every aspect of daily life in Zaire and nurtured a sense of nationalism and identity unity that could have laid the groundwork for a major national rejuvenation. Nevertheless, while recognizing the attempt to reshape the country according to an idealized past, its implications should not be forgotten: a massive curtailment of citizens' rights to freedom of expression and self-determination. The promise of the purging of the failures of colonization soon gave way to the horrors of dictatorship. The Afrocentric vision, idealized as a return to traditional African values, resulted in a system marked by failures and misdeeds, disregarding the true interests of the Congolese people.

Political measures in the 1990s were, in essence, a deliberate attempt to obstruct the momentum toward democracy[28].

One question that arises is why the Congolese people exhibited minimal resistance to Mobutu's multifaceted dictatorship, which, as seen so far, encompassed the cultural, political, and economic aspects of the lives of Zaire's citizens. A primary reason lies in the fact that all political dissents and popular discontent were brutally suppressed. The People's Movement of the Revolution was leaving no room for opposition. However, even if repression through force was deliberately employed to contrast opposition, internal and external groups have been responding to and resisting Mobutu's oppressive regime.

Before the end of the '80s, organized dissent was ineffective and isolated, yet, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, resistance became more provocative and aggressive. In order to stop the wake of democracy demand from his population, Mobutu engaged in a two-month tour of Zaire in 1990, fostering a "direct dialogue with the people." As part of the undertaken national consultation initiative, a more formal than de facto concession, Zairian citizens were invited to contribute ideas regarding the governance of state institutions and the nation. Not surprisingly, the response was unprecedented, with over 6,000 memoranda submitted, including pamphlets that openly criticized the president, called for his resignation, and advocated for mass demonstrations, reflecting a growing wave of public dissent (Leslie 2019, 50).

The internal opposition mainly came from university students, who fiercely opposed the regime. They organized autonomous student movements and manifested their opposition, which was however brutally repressed. Already shortly after independence, students organized in the *Union*

[28] In addition, the dictator's obstructionism, promoted in order to preserve the status quo, was perceived as evidence of his attempt to divert his people from the pursuit of harmony and peace. Peta Ikambana, Jean-Louis. 2006. *Mobutu's Totalitarian Political System: An Afrocentric Analysis*. Routledge, 80.

National des Étudiants du Congo et du Ruanda-Urundi (UNECRU) and, in the Lovanium University, in the *Union Générale des Étudiants Congolais* (UGEC) to oppose tribalism and defend Lumumba's nationalist beliefs. Inspired by the French protests of '68, they demanded greater participation, fairer distribution of scholarships, educational reforms, and increased stipends clashing with the police. Mobutu tried to repress students' dissent, replacing the UGEC, which was more overtly political, with the *Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (JMPR), constituting the youth arm of the MPR. The JMPR, created in 1967, was concerned with the political matters relating to Zairian youth. However, this replacement further exacerbated students' protests. A student strike in 1969 met Mobutu's drastic reaction: he deployed the army, ordered firing on the protesters, arrested more than five hundred students, and sentenced the leaders to 20 years in prison. Nevertheless, demonstrations continued in the following years, when the major ones, in 1971, 1979 and 1980, were suppressed with violence (Leslie 2019, 52-54).

The manifest dissatisfaction of the population, whose lack of freedom and rights could no longer be ignored, but above all, the Western express support for a dictator blamed for vicious atrocities, could no longer be ignored. Hence, in 1990, Mobutu, due to political pressure triggered by the end of the Cold War, had to open to multipartyism and allow more political freedom, which was still corrupted by Mobutu[29]. The democratization process was announced on April 24, 1990, when President Mobutu gave his 'Third Republic' speech over the radio, announcing the abolition of the single-party state, the introduction of political reforms, and the adoption of a new Constitution. Between the reforms, he mentioned the division of functions between the head of state and the head of government and the subsequent introduction of a multi-party-political system following a transitional period. Furthermore, he proclaimed the "depoliticization" of the police, the civil service, the army, and the paramilitary forces. Additionally, he advocated for the establishment of free trade unions (O'Ballance 1999, 141-142).

The transition, which started in 1990, was not leading anywhere. Even if over 200 parties were established, many were led or controlled by Mobutists, and neither the promised elections nor the transitional government ever took place. On 3 February 1993, the governments of the United States, Belgium, and France issued a joint declaration in which they warned Mobutu that he was required to cease impeding reforms and to transfer his executive powers to Prime Minister Tshisekedi. They

[29] Mobutu skillfully managed to co-opt opposition members and support the creation of allied factions, resulting in a remarkable increase in the number of political parties. By the year's end, over 200 parties had been registered. The competition between parties in favor of Mobutu and the ones countering the regime, led to violent ethnic eruptions in the regions of Shaba e North Kivu.

further stated that, should he fail to comply, he would face total isolation. Mobutu rejected these demands (O'Ballance 1999, 146).

1.3.4. *Proximate Causes of the End of Zaire: The Rwandan Factor*

According to Rotberg, among the prism of the 1990s crises, the end of the Cold War emerged as a watershed in the unraveling of the Mobutist State, showing the international isolation and internal legitimacy deficit. Rotberg further argues that an additional external factor that influenced Mobutu's regime fall was the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 (Rotberg 2003). Indeed, the collapse of the Zairian state, from an economic point of view and in terms of external support, was not the only factor. A specific combination of events and circumstances provides a more accurate explanation of the disintegration of the successive wars. The most significant one can be found in the recent tragic history of Rwanda's genocide.

The resulting flow of refugees poured into eastern Congo since millions of Hutu refugees escaped the horrific massacre in Rwanda. The origins of the war, which spread in 1996, lie in the historical relationship between Congo and Rwanda, which, specifically in the eastern DRC, shared the same ethnic groups, a factor that was not considered in the division of borders of the Great Lakes region. Even internally, Zaire was starting to manifest its weakness. In April 1996, after many months of fighting between the president and the opposition, presidential and legislative elections were announced to be held in May 1997. In the meantime, an escalation of discontent and outbreaks of crisis grew in the country, and the magnitude of fights in eastern Zaire increased. This conflict was later denominated 'the First Congo War'. However, to analyze the roots of the war, it is necessary to briefly dive into the political struggle of Rwanda.

In 1994, a genocide was committed in Rwanda by radical Hutu against the Tutsi, which went down in History as one of the most tragic crimes against humanity. After the genocide, a new government was established, with the victory of the *Rwandan Patriotic Front* (RPF). The RPF was a well-trained armed force, born in Uganda at the end of the 1980s, predominantly composed of descendants of Tutsi refugees who had departed Rwanda during the ethnic violence that accompanied the country's transition to independence between the late 1950s and early 1980s. In the aftermath of the genocide, which saw the deaths of approximately one million Tutsis and Hutu opponents, over a span of just three months, the advance of the *Rwandan Patriotic Army* (RPA), the military arm of the RPF, resulted in the displacement of approximately one and a half million Hutus seeking refuge in

eastern Zaire (Macola 2021, 213). Therefore, events in the adjacent region became the cause of a change of balance in the neighboring region of the two Kivu, which had to host numerous densely populated refugee camps, mostly concentrated in north Kivu.
The remaining elements of the disbanded Hutu military forces initiated a process of reorganization in the territory of Congo. The camps functioned as training and organizational hubs for former soldiers of the Interahamwe (Hutu militia) and the *Forces Armées Rwandaises* (FAR), which was the army of the ethnic Hutu-dominated Rwandan regime that carried out the genocide (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 176). From 1994 to 1995, a series of incursions were launched by Hutu extremists who fled to Zaire against the northern and western regions of Rwanda. The military personnel and paramilitaries deployed in the refugee camps not only invaded the Rwandan territory but also engaged in attacks against the Tutsi communities of the two Kivu.

The Hutu, who in the meanwhile became a dominant force, started to attack the Congolese Tutsi. Indeed, what has not been mentioned so far is that in the areas of the Rwandan exodus, conflicts have already arisen based on the distinction between Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge. The ethnic structure in Congo was nothing short of complex. At the time it was possible to distinguish two groups in the region: the Banyarwanda[30] (literally 'originally from Rwanda') and the Banyamulenge (people of Mulenge) (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 13). Of the Banyarwanda were an heterogeneous group, on the other hand, the Banyamulenge were mainly Congolese of Tutsi origin who migrated from Rwanda to Sud-Kivu probably in the late eighteenth century[31] (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 22). The exodus of the Banyamulenge occurred again in the 1930s and 1940s, during the period of Belgian colonial rule. It involved the importation of approximately 100,000 Rwandans to eastern Congo, where they were forced to work on plantations and farms, as well as in the mining sector. This has been identified as a key contributing factor to the ongoing conflict in eastern Congo, which is characterized by struggles for land, citizenship, and power. This elucidates the fact that the conflict did not start only with the Rwandan 1994 genocide, it rather had more complex origins.

[30] The Banyarwanda of North Kivu, comprising several hundred thousand individuals, were a mixed population of both Hutu and Tutsi descent. They were the descendants of Rwandan farm workers who were relocated across the border by the Belgians from the late 1930s onwards. On the other hand, the smaller Banyamulenge of South Kivu were Tutsi pastoralists who had lived in the region's highlands since pre-colonial times. The Banyarwanda population can be distinguished, in turn, into several groups. First, one can determine the 'natives,' who have been in the region since pre-colonial times, and the 'immigrants' or 'transplanted', the ones who arrived during the colonial period. Moreover, they can be further differentiated into the 'infiltrators' and 'clandestines' who came before and after independence: the Tutsi, who arrived primarily between 1959 and 1964, 1973, and 1990–94, and the Hutu, who arrived in great numbers in mid-1994 as refugees. Filip Reyntjens. 2011. *The Great African War : Congo and Regional Geopolitics, 1996-2006*. Cambridge University Press, 13.
[31] onsequently, they held Zairean citizenship, even in the context of the most restrictive legislative constraints.

It is relevant to consider that, the reasons of the roots of the conflicts lay in different factors apart from ethnic reasons, which can be traced back to contrasting modalities of land use, the competing force that stemmed from the democratization process of 1990, rights, and citizenship (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 14-15). Regarding the last point, during the Zairian regime, Tutsis did not obtain the same rights, such as land ownership (Muraya and Ahere 2014, 14).
This division has its roots in the Belgian Congo. Those who were not indigenous, that is to say, refugees or immigrants, were not permitted to access land in accordance with customary practices. Therefore, this division between indigenous and non-indigenous was artificially constituted by Belgians, who, in the first place, had encouraged immigrants from Rwanda to work mainly in the mining conglomerate. This system did not evolve after independence[32] (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 175).

The situation at the border worsened quickly and considerably. Due to the massive influx of refugees, which complicated the demographic balance of the region, the alliance between the Hutu and Tutsi Banyarwanda broke down (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 17), resulting in violent conflict between the two groups. The Tutsi Banyarwandans of North Kivu suffered repeated attacks by Rwandan 'refugee-warriors', who sometimes acted in concert with the pre-existing 'indigenous' militias known by the name of 'Mayi-Mayi'. At the beginning of October 1996, in South Kivu, the governor announced that if the Banyamulenge would have not left the territory, they would have been considered rebels (Macola 2021, 217-219). The reaction was almost immediate. Having refused them, the Banyamulenge turned to the Rwandan government for help, which attacked the Hutu camps and the Zairian army, and on October 17, a full-scale war began in the province, which quickly spread to the entire east of the country. At the end of October, the Rwandese invasion of the two Kivu initiated the *First Congo War*.

The main actor of the First Congo War was the AFDL, *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo*, which was formed initially as an umbrella organization for Congolese Tutsis. It was initially founded in south Kivu on 18 October 1996. The document constituting the AFDL, which was signed by four political movements[33] (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 103), stated that the

[32] The citizenship issue was already discussed after independence, and, in 1972, compelled Mobutu to issue a Citizenship Decree, which granted citizenship to those who arrived in Kivu from Rwanda in 1959. However, the Decree was already overthrown in 1981, with another Citizenship Law, whose criteria required a connection with the Congo that could date back to at least 1885. Renton, David, Leo Zeilig, and David Seddon. 2013. *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance*. London: Zed Books, 175.
[33] The four components were: the *Parti de la Révolution Populaire* (PRP), represented by L.D. Kabila; the *Conseil National de Résistance pour la Démocratie* (CNRD), represented by Kisase Ngandu; the *Mouvement Révolutionnaire*

leadership of the movement would be entrusted to Laurent Kabila. Kabila, initially one of the young Lumumbist cadres and with a Marxist-Leninist' inspired political action, was the vice-president of the *Comité National de Libération* (CNL), an organization created in 1963 in Brazzaville by rebels in exile. In 1964, he assumed the role of leader of a provisional government, providing strategic guidance to the rebellion in north Katanga. However, he was subsequently forced to flee to Burundi. In 1967, he returned and formed the *Parti de la Révolution Populaire* (PRP) (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 185-186). The insurgents easily extended their control over the region and captured Goma, Uvira, and Bukavu. In the following months, the war expanded in scope.

The conquest of the entire country and the overthrow of Mobutu's government emerged as additional objectives. The steady march of the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) and RPA troops was actually almost unchallenged. The *Forces Armées Zaïroises* (FAZ) could not compete with a professional and highly motivated militia, being poorly funded and trained[34]. When they had to face the attacks, many restored to sold weapons and ammunition to rebels before retreating (Filip Reyntjens 2011, 108). The already robust action of the AFDL, supported by Rwandan military forces, was further reinforced by the addition of Burundi[35], Angola, and Uganda[36] (Macola 2021, 221-222).

Nevertheless, also other countries, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, provided varying degrees of assistance to Kabila's insurgents. The fighting and breakdown of law and order in the east of the country produced a widespread humanitarian emergency that, coupled with the rebellion, jeopardized the integrity of the Zairean state (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 171).

On 16 May 1997, besieged and deserted by Sudan and France, and suffering from serious cancer, Mobutu went into exile. The very next day, the AFDL forces entered Kinshasa. It took only six months for the poorly equipped and led coalition of the AFDL to enter the capital. With hindsight, the same moment the Rwandan army was crossing into eastern Congo in October 1996, creating the

pour la Libération du Zaïre (MRLZ), represented by Masasu Nindaga; and the *Alliance Démocratique des Peuples*, represented by Déo Bugera.

[34] In 1996, the FAZ reflected the dysfunction of the state itself. Despite the army's official count of 75,000 troops, it was severely underfunded, receiving only 2–3% of GDP during the 1990s. Moreover, they suffered from politicization, nepotism, corruption, and embezzlement, leaving troops unpaid, untrained, and unequipped.

[35] The involvement of Burundi's army in the war was limited respect to the Uganda's one.

[36] Similar to Rwanda, Uganda also aspired to eradicate the threat posed by rebel movements that, in the first half of the 1990s, had found a refuge and a base from which to operate in the anarchic northeast of Zaire. The armed groups in question were the West Nile Bank Liberation Front and the Allied Democratic Forces. Both were backed by the Islamist regime in Sudan, Museveni's rival. Museveni was and still is the President of Uganda, since 1986. Nevertheless, also other countries, including Eritrea, Ethiopia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, provided varying degrees of assistance to Kabila's insurgents. This included the deployment of mercenaries, the facilitation of rebel forces crossing their territories, the contribution of military personnel, weaponry and uniforms, and other forms of assistance. Reyntjens, Filip. 2011. *The Great African War : Congo and Regional Geopolitics*, 1996-2006. Cambridge University Press, 65.

conditions for Kabila's march in Kinshasa, the state of Zaire had already ceased to exist (Rotberg 2003, 43), since he proved to be no longer able to obtain any serious military support from abroad. On May 29, Kabila became president. The alliance quickly restored the country's pre-1971 name, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and installed a new government. The fall of "Washington's most valuable ally in Central Africa", as George Bushed referred to Mobutu in 1988, who once gained Western support and funding to fight opponents in adjacent countries, was proof that, with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the end of the Cold War, Western diplomacies had to re-evaluate their alliances. Mobutu's escape ended Washington's last Cold War alliance in Africa.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a chronological historical analysis of the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo, from 1908, with the beginning of the colonial experience of the Belgian Congo, to 1997, with the fall of Mobutu's dictatorial regime.

A brief parenthesis included the aftermath of the Berlin Conference of 1884, when the Congo became the personal possession of the King Leopold II (1885–1908), who subjected the entire population to immense suffering. The subsequent transfer of the territory to Belgian state control (1908–1960) did not result in any significant improvement in the conditions of the Congolese population. Belgium maintained a centralized structure of colonial administration, while pursuing economic exploitation, albeit with less brutal methods. During this period, infrastructure improvements were implemented, however, forced labor persisted in Belgium's 'model colony'.
In the first part of the Chapter I focused on the conditions and circumstances that led to Congolese population's political awakening. The event is symbolically represented by the publication of the first nationalist manifesto in 1956, *Conscience Africaine*, which became the vanguard of the "anti-colonial struggle". However, according to Young, the colonial establishment was cognizant of an evolving sentiment of discontent among the emerging educated elite, whose preliminary grievances centered on the pervasive racism that permeated the colonial context, as well as the necessity for personal status that aligned with their educational achievements (Young 2012,).

Following the *Manifesto*, the first political voices began to emerge, accompanied by the formation of the first political parties, which were primarily of a tribal nature. Numerous Congolese political organizations emerged, including the Alliance des Ba-Kongo (Abako) and the Mouvement

National Congolais (MNC). The leader of the MNC, Patrice Lumumba, played a key role in the struggle for independence. Within a brief period, demands for independence became increasingly unignorable. In response to the increasing violence and civil unrest, Belgium took the decision to end its sovereignty over the Congo on 30 June 1960, leading to a government wit Lumumba as prime minister and Kasavubu as president.

The unrest did not conclude with the tumultuous attainment of independence in 1960. In the aftermath of a mutiny within the military, the nation found itself embroiled in the "Congo Crisis," a civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1965. This brief parenthesis, which saw the advent of the First Republic, was marked by the administrative system's disintegration and the state's collapse. A particularly salient event that occurred during this period was the secession of Katanga (1960-1963), led by Moise Tshombe and supported by Belgium. Under the guise of restoring order, Belgium intervened militarily, prompting Lumumba to request UN assistance. The crisis escalated into a theater of the Cold War, marked by vehement accusations of neocolonialism. Another central event was the tragic assassination of Patrice Lumumba in 1962.

In 1965, with a coup d'état, the General Mobutu Sese Seko inaugurated, with his long dictatorship, the Second Republic. Notwithstanding the name, the regime was characterized by a one-party system embellished with nepotism, corruption, and strongly debatable economic reforms.

During Mobutu's rule, a plethora of policies were initiated, encompassing not only the economic and financial domains but also the cultural and social spheres. Among these, particular attention must be directed towards the Authenticity project, which was designed to promote Zairean culture and identity, and Mobutism, a political religion centered on the cult of personality of Mobutu's figure. Despite Western countries' backing for his anti-communist stance, this support began to fade. With the end of the Cold War and strong accusations of government corruption and mismanagement, Mobutu was forced to undertake a process of democratization between 1990 and 1997. However, it proved unsuccessful and exposed the full fragility of the system at the onset of the First Congo War. The chapter concludes with a brief analysis of the proximate cause of the regime's demise, namely the war triggered by neighboring Rwanda, from which a great influx of refugees arrived in eastern Congo, as a result of the 1994 genocide. This led to ethnic conflicts and the creation of armed groups, including the A*lliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL), led by Laurent Kabila, which brought Mobutu Sese Seko's regime to an end in 1997.

Chapter II

The Church and State nexus in colonial and postcolonial Congo

Introduction

Colonialism had a profound and lasting impact on the political, social and economic structures of the Congo. Its legacy is still evident in various dimensions of the country's development, which, according to Kisangani (1997, 4-6), can be traced to four areas. First, he stressed the centralized administrative system, which divided the territory along arbitrary tribal lines in order to keep social order. Then, through urbanization and the shaping of ethnic identity, thanks to its discriminating policies of development, which favored certain minerally richer regions over others. The fourth legacy was the integration of the State into the world economy. Among these variables, it is relevant to consider that the endurance of colonialism legacy can be interpreted as a consequence of the strength and deepness of Belgium's allies' domain, namely the Roman Catholic Church and the business enterprises. As a matter of fact, on the one hand, the colonial state had a pivotal role in shaping ethnic relations by setting up regional boundaries, on the other hand, the church was fundamental in the education of Africans. Indeed, these two factors are closely intertwined, as the monopoly of education in the hands of the Christian missions laid the foundations for the late formation of an educated Congolese elite and the consequent deferred emergence of political parties, which became entrenched on a tribal basis during the independence process.

The analysis of evangelical missions is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of colonial Belgium's penetration level in Congo. Indeed, the scholars' thematic literature on this matter frequently yielded divergent results. In his influential book *Politics in Congo*, Crawford Young (2015) advanced and documented the aforementioned tripartite relationship. He likewise argued that, along with business enterprises, the Church formed part of a 'seamless web' in tandem with colonial officialdom, even if he challenged the idea of the profound interconnection of the two elements. As Loffman (2019) argues, it is not correct to describe the relationship between the State and the Church as an alliance, yet it would be more correct to talk about 'competitive collaborators'. This is because, although they had collaborated on common goals, their agendas frequently clashed with one another. It is challenging to overstate the profound impact of the Catholic Church in the Democratic Republic

of the Congo (DRC). Indeed, it has been referred to as the nation's 'only truly national institution apart from the state' (Mufika and Stoker 2020, 2).

In order to examine the degree of interaction between the Church and the State, it is essential to understand the genesis of the phenomenon, which will be analyzed in the first part of the Chapter and can be traced back to the impetus for missions in Africa. This African ‘race’ enabled the missionaries, thanks to the expeditions and akin to explorers, to gradually penetrate the entire continent. This momentum was driven by a growing demand for raw materials during the period of the Industrial Revolution, which compelled Europeans to penetrate the African continent. However, the very same establishment of the colonial state in Central Africa was predicated on the imperative of the *'mission civilisatrice'*, that is, the endeavor to civilize the Indigenous populations to Christianity. Nonetheless, the dynamics were more nuanced and layered. The missionaries in Congo were unable to undertake any significant actions without the implicit consent of the colonizers, and the latter were reluctant to concede or compromise on anything that was not in harmony with their political and cultural ideals (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 194).
Moreover, this part will investigate a number of factors, starting with the theoretical and historical matter of evangelization. In relation to this, the thesis will focus on the difference between Catholic and Protestant missions and the tensions that resulted, taking into account the interests and modalities of conversion, as well as the different approaches of the testimonies to the mistreatment of the Congolese. Furthermore, a section will be dedicated to the White Fathers of Cardinal Lavigerie, as their evangelical work is widely recognized as being of significantly exemplificative. They serve as a prime example of the beliefs and practices that characterized the missionaries of that era.

The mutual influence and complex alliance between the Church and the State will be observed in the second part of the Chapter, with as much respect as possible for the diversity of circumstances in time and space. Indeed, throughout its history, Christianity in the Congo did not have a linear relationship with the colonial state, instead, cooperation frequently coexisted with compromise, and even with conflict. The relationship with the colonial state will be explored through the historical accounts of their interactions, placing particular emphasis on their primary "glue," which is the dominant role of the missions in the territory's educational framework.
The capillarity of the missionary schooling system throughout the territory was made possible by the initial full support of the Belgian administration of King Leopold II, but even during the period of the Belgian Congo, the Church's involvement in colonialism was such that it could be described as a second colonial power in the Congo. This bond will be at the core of one of the few instances of

conflict between the two entities, prompting the missions to realize that, in order to survive, they were compelled to undertake a process of renewal.

This will be followed by an examination of the relationship between the State and the Church during the period of independence, focusing then on the years of the dictatorship of General Mobutu Sese Seko. The field of education will be again analyzed in this context as both a source of contention and a means of conflict resolution. The regime will attempt to counter the church's accumulated power during the colonial period. Conversely, during periods of vulnerability, Mobutu will engage in a relaxation of relations with the church to re-establish control. This last part of the chapter will address as well the internal divisions within the church that will emerge in the new context.

2.1. *Evangelization: bridging faith and power*

The main objective of the missionaries was to proclaim Jesus Christ, to convert the hearers, and to find faith. Gombaniro Rutashigwa (2018) identified three phases in this process. From 'saving souls' to 'evangelizing', through the 'implantation of the Church'. The term "evangelization" encompasses the comprehensive missionary process, and its commitment is further extended to the social sphere in its broadest sense, thereby underscoring the Church's societal engagement and the genesis of its social teaching (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 108). On the basis of this concept, there is a partial understanding of the phenomenon. Evangelization will be used as a pretext for implanting, controlling, and dominating the Congo. By dominating, I refer to exercising effective power and control over the spiritual and social spheres, in an attempt to eradicate the customs of the local culture. This section will outline the genesis of this phenomenon. It will look at the characteristics of a church in internal conflict between Protestants and Catholics, and then describe its structure and thinking. This analysis will also briefly touch upon both the dominant movements, such as the White Fathers, and those of messianic protest, such as Kimabguism. Finally, a moment of positive action taken by a denouncing Church against an aggressive power will be observed, which in the form of the Congolese Reform Movement will find no equal in the future.

2.1.1. *The Civilizing Mission: Evangelization*

It is possible to say that during the nineteenth century Christian missionaries not only assisted the professional explorers in their activities, yet they were themselves part of the exploration processes. Still, according to the work of Gombaniro Rutashigwa (2018), it is possible to distinguish also three major phases in these two thousand years of evangelization: the first five centuries, the 15th century with the expeditions of Portuguese and Spanish navigators, and, finally, the mid-19th century and the European idea of the universal civilizing mission. Such distinction is relevant in order to recognize that evangelization in the Congo at the end of the 19th century was not the first of its kind [37]. Rather, it was the second in order of chronology. The first evangelization occurred in 1483, led by Portuguese Catholic missionaries who accompanied the explorer Diego Cão, who reached the mouth of the Congo River in 1482. Subsequently, the Italian Capuchin missionaries remained in the region until 1835. (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 41-49).

In the context of exploration in the Democratic Republic of Congo, two figures have been identified as having played a pivotal role: David Livingstone and Henri-Morton Stanley. The former was a Scottish missionary, who traveled to South Africa in 1841 on behalf of the London Protestant Missionary Society[38] (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 161). Livingstone's journey continued with the journalist Henry Morton Stanley[39], who had set off in search of him. Livingstone died in 1873 in the swamps of Lake Bangouélo, north of Zambia. Stanley's[40] expedition was unique in the history of exploration, as he was the first to chart the entire course of the Congo River to its mouth, which he reached in 1877. During his journeys, he sent press releases to English and American newspapers, some of which were read with great interest by Charles Lavigerie, Archbishop of Algiers. (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 75-80).

King Leopold curiously observed that these voyages, thanks to the tales of these explorers, had attracted the international community's attention, acknowledging the possibility of utilizing the

[37] Beginning in the 1850s onwards, several European explorers, motivated by geographical, scientific, sometimes missionary, and finally commercial concerns, began to travel across the African continent, mainly the vast, previously unexplored regions of inner Africa. Political powers followed this movement, and, by the end of the 19th century, vast territories of the African continent were under the rule of a few European countries, including France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Belgium. Gann, Lewis H. 2015. *The Rulers of Belgian Africa, 1884-1914*. Princeton University Press, 207-209.

[38] A man of faith, with a deep respect for the people he met and a passion for this unknown continent, he ventured north and explored vast areas of Zambia, the south of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Great Lakes, and Angola for over twenty years

[39] His real name was John Rowlands.

[40] In his writings, Hoschild reserved words of admiration and respect for Livingstone. However, he was more critical of Stanley, describing him as "*far from being a great hero, Stanley had been a tyrant*". Hochschild, Adam. 1999. *King Leopold's Ghost : A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Mariner Books, 110.

situation to its advantage. Consequently, Leopold adopted the guise of a philanthropist, advocating the decrease of the slave trade, moral upliftment, and advances in science. This, partially, earned him the trust of the European states at the Berlin Conference (Rutz 2018, 8-9).

Therefore, the role of the Church in the Congo can be traced back to the Brussels Conference of 12 September 1876[41], when King Leopold II outlined the humanitarian grounds for his initiative for the civilization of equatorial Africa (Doyle 2019, preface). The Holy See acknowledged that they had to take part in the anti-slavery campaign that was becoming widespread and followed with great interest the ideas of civilizing equatorial Africa. It is evident that Leopold's appeal to the Church was driven as well by the hope that it would provide sponsorship for the establishment of the Belgian mission in the Congo. The 'right of patronage', a privilege accorded by the Holy See to Catholic princes in recently conquered territories, encompassed the right to sponsor the founding of a mission (Balaamo Mokelwa 2009, 26).

Consequently, several provisions were included in the final act of the Berlin Conference to safeguard the civilizing mission of the Church. Among these provisions, the most pivotal was enshrined in Article 6[42] of the initial chapter of the General Act of the Berlin Conference of 1884 (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 161). It committed the participating parties to the preservation of Indigenous populations, the enhancement of their moral and material conditions, and the contribution to the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. Moreover, it favored the activities of religious institutions dedicated to the education and ‘betterment’ of Indigenous populations, and it stipulated full freedom of conscience and religious tolerance (Ngomo-Okitembo 1998, 26-27).

By the end of the 1890s, it was clear that the future both of Christianity and civilization in Congo would have been identified with the State. With the support of the monarchy, the Belgian Catholic missionaries worked in conjunction with the state. As was reported in the missionary newspapers of the time, this work was conducted with the objective of achieving the 'material and moral regeneration of the African population' (Cline 1963, 47).

On 26 May 1906, an agreement between the Vatican of Pope Pius X with the Congo Free State and, from 1908, with its successor, the Belgian Congo, was met. Essentially, the 1906 agreement formalized an already existing tacit agreement. Namely, the missions were free to establish

[41] Both the United States and all the European powers were sensitive to the appeals of humanitarian movements, particularly to the ones of the religious missions, which denounced the ravages of slavery and the slave trade.

[42] It also granted special protections to “*all religious, scientific, philanthropic establishments or enterprises” that aimed “to instruct the inhabitants and make them understand and appreciate the advantages of civilization*.” Article 6 of the General Act of the Berlin Conference, 26 Feb. 1885.

themselves on the territory, not only as religious institutions, but also as agricultural, commercial, and small industrial activities. In return, the missions had agreed to establish an educational system in the colony[43] (Fabian 1983, 169-170). However, the Concordat formally consolidated the influence of Belgian Catholic missions[44], granting them continuous grants of land and financial support to assist them in continuing their educational, scientific, and religious endeavors (Lemarchand 2023, 123).
This accord was an attempt of Leopold to restore the Catholic Church to its former position of dominance and, secondly, to discourage the growth of Protestantism. The fact that the missions were supposed to carry out geographical, linguistic, and ethnographic research for the state shows the link between Belgium and the Roman Catholic Church. In point of fact, the 1906 concordat established a framework of cooperation between the missions and the administration (Ngomo-Okitembo 1998, 28-29). The state became responsible not only for maintaining missionaries in the territory but also for financing Catholic missionary schools. In addition, the granting of territories, which amounted to 200 hectares per mission station, was carried out through extensive legal concessions, which directly allowed the use of the territories for commercial gain[45].
According to official statistics, in application of the 1906 Convention, the Catholic Missions received 147,000 hectares in 1947, of which half were received in full ownership. In comparison, the Protestant Missions received only 8,600 hectares (Maurel 1992, 217).

2.1.2. *Catholic and Protestant Missions: Characteristics and Mutual Tensions*

As observed, catholic missionaries arrived in Congo in the late nineteenth century, thanks to King Leopold's vision of his civilized Congo Free State. It is officially recognized that the 'first' to arrive was a catholic French order, the Missionaries of Africa, better known as the *White Fathers* (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 161). Meanwhile, the beginning of protestant missionary work can be traced back to the first protestant mission group, the *British Missionary Society* (BMS), which arrived in the

[43] However, the convention of 26 May 1906 was simple in nature and limited to generalities. It reduced the issue of the *Missions du Congo* to a question of education, legal recognition of religious associations, the granting of land, the treatment to be accorded to missionaries in permanent residence, and collaboration between missionaries and State agents. Balaamo Mokelwa, Jean-Pacifique. 2009. *Eglises et Etat En République Démocratique Du Congo: Fondements Juridiques et Jurisprudence (1876-2006)*. Editions L'Harmattan, 78.
[44] Nevertheless, non-Belgian catholic missionaries continued their services in Congo, and the Belgian evangelical protestants still received small state funding.
[45] Orders that had taken vows of poverty, such as the Trappists, Franciscans, and Capucins, refused these great concessions, while others, such as the Cistercians, took full advantage of them. Young, Crawford. 2015. Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence. Princeton University Press, 13-14.

Congo already in 1878 and soon became a threat from the point of view of Leopold, who, as seen before, strongly favored catholic Belgian missions.

Protestant Missionaries who served in the DRC were mostly from North America (USA and Canada), Great Britain, and Scandinavia, mainly from Sweden and Norway. Following the initial arrival of Protestant missionaries, the challenges they faced were not solely confined to the local context but were also subject to broader international concern, due to the harsh treatment of the indigenous population by King Leopold, and the Belgian government (from 1908 to 1938). However, they could count on the support of international bodies. Over the years, the Protestant missionary work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has been subject to the influence of the World Mission Conferences (*La conférence missionnaire mondiale*), a direct outcome of the Edinburgh Conference in June 1910[46], which led to the establishment of a permanent committee, the Continuation Committee. Later on, in 1924, the Congo Protestant Council (*Conseil Protestant du Congo*) (CPC) was formed, in order to bring together the missionaries for spiritual inspiration and worship, and also to discuss common issues related to their work[47]. The CPC was founded a few years after the International Missionary Council (*Conseil Missionnaire International*), which was the development of the Continuation Committee, but the influence of the ecumenical movement, which brought the various Protestant missions closer together, did not affect their relations with Catholics. These bodies were important in forging a united "Protestant" position, which highlighted the problem of anti-Protestant prejudice and the government's preferential treatment of Catholics in the Congolese context (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 163).

Not surprisingly, the period of open hostility between Protestant and Catholic missionaries dates back to the beginning of the evangelization mission (Markowitz 1970, 235-236). At times, for example, there were outright battles between competing Catholic catechists and Protestant evangelists in the same village. During the Congo Reform movement at the turn of the century, Protestant missionaries came into open conflict with the authorities by publishing reports in England and the

[46] In June of 1910, the World Missionary Conference was held in Edinburgh, Scotland, for a total duration of ten days. The event was of an international nature and was characterized by its ecumenical nature.
Approximately 1,200 delegates from predominantly European and American Protestant denominations convened to address the necessity for global missions and to explore the potential forms these missions could assume at the dawn of the 20th century.

[47] The Congo Protestant Council (CPC) was formed as a loose association to represent Protestants as a group to the colonial government, which was strongly anti-Protestant and pro-Catholic. Therefore most Protestant missions joined the CPC. It was never a legislative body, but a representative group. It helped to inform the new missions about un-evangelized areas, and later to influence the colonial government on issues such as land for mission schools, grants for medical or educational work, and requests for state recognition necessary for legal status and continued presence in the colony. Garrard, David J. 2013. "The Protestant Church in Congo: The Mobutu Years and Their Impact." *The Journal of Religion in Africa* 43 (2): 131–66. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12341246, 132.

United States that provided first-hand information about the mismanagement of Congo. As foreign missionaries, they were treated as an unwelcome nuisance. Shortly after Belgium took control of the Congo in 1908, the Colonial Office even drew up a plan to replace foreign Protestant missionaries with Belgians. This plan was doomed from the start because there were not enough Protestants in Belgium to take on such a heavy burden. (Baëta 2018, 97-98). Although no longer under the patronage of Leopold II, the Catholic missions continued to play an important role under the Belgian regime as well, continuously increasing in number and power [48](Maurel 1992, 220-221).

As a result, the impact of the Catholic missionaries became evident in the villages of the regions where they were stationed, and through their extensive intervention in education and healthcare, they were able to influence the population on aspects such as traditions, gender, sexuality, and biological reproduction (Likaka 2009, 49). The usual procedure to spread God's word was direct conversion, which initially focused on freed slaves and the youths, since it was the most successful method (Wesseling 2015, 65). They were driven by a sense of cultural superiority and frequently challenged fundamental aspects of Congolese culture. Nevertheless, numerically speaking, the missionary impact was anything but massive, but they still helped to fragment the traditional structure of local Congolese societies, providing no alternative for the community integration they obliterated. Adopting the role of agents of social transformation and modernization (as 'civilizers'), they simultaneously sought to preserve their position within the prevailing social order. As Markowitz (1970) analyzes, "*Many of the missionaries who came to the Congo tended to view themselves as builders of a new society, not as destroyers of traditional Africa […]. Thus, often blind to the disintegrative aspects of their influence, they could contend, as did one missionary, that the destruction of tribal institutions was caused, not by the missions, but entirely by the government and the commercial enterprises*." (Markowitz 1970, 236).

Even though the difference between Protestants and Catholics had a heavy significance in Europe, it was usually less important for the African populations (Wesseling 2015, 65). However, as evident in their hostility and structural differences, the same sectoral divisions permeated evangelical mission in Central Africa after the Reform. The protestants were regarded as 'outsiders' as their composition only to a small degree saw the participation of Belgian groups since they were rather

[48] In the urban centers, the missionaries controlled social centers, study circles, sports teams, and savings banks, dividing their influence between the administration and the trusts. The spread of ideas dangerous to the colonial order was strictly controlled by these entities, which owned the newspapers, libraries, and film equipment. Missionaries and booksellers censored books and magazines. The Catholic cinema produced propaganda films for internal use: even Westerns were censored to suppress the enthusiastic reactions of the Congolese to every attack by Indians on a white convoy.

composed of British, American, and Scandinavian missionaries. Certainly, the latter's loyalty to the Belgian crown was not a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, they also exhibited other differentiating characteristics. In contrast to the Protestant approach, which involved the deployment of a limited number of African evangelists as intermediaries between the tribal society and the Church, the Catholic Church directed its efforts towards the community as a whole.

The latter modality of conversion was inaugurated around 1895 by the Jesuit Father Van Hencxthoven in the Kwango vicariate and can be ascribed to the *ferme-chapelle* (closed-chapel), an institution that incorporated evangelistic, educational, and religious activities (MacGaffey 1982, 241-242). The *ferme-chapelle* system was formally initiated on 4 March 1892, through a decree that authorized Catholic missions to 'host' orphans and abandoned children. Evidence suggests that religious groups, leveraging the endorsement of the state, engaged in systematic child recruitment if not forced conscription[49]. The 1892 decree, employed in this manner, functioned as a convenient instrument for missionaries to procure themselves a substantial workforce (Maurel 1992, 218-219). Compared to the protest missions, the catholic ones provided for a wider spectrum of activities, and, thanks to the support they enjoyed, their role went beyond the educational mission, but also involved manual and agricultural work, the elaboration and implementation of colonial policy (Lemarchand 2023, 123-124).

A clear consequence of this significant conferral of power to the missionaries was the directly proportional decline in the authority of traditional chiefs. The retention of authority was also attained by not letting Africans interpret the Scriptures directly, as it occurred in British colonies. Regarding this, Catholic priests were accusing Protestants of inducing the population to develop a sense of independence and rebellion, as a result of the free study of the Bible (Kisangani 2022, 65). There was also a common perception that Protestants wanted to create self-supporting and governing African churches (Gann 2015, 211). Moreover, the rivalry between Catholics and Protestants – with the former accusing the latter of bestowing the creation of nativistic sects, and the latter blaming the former for administration-church collusion – had an impact on the perception of Christianity by the Congolese. This conflict seemed incompatible with the very same mission of evangelization and ‘unity of all men in Christ’, leading to a lack of religious engagement and disillusionment.

Taking all factors into consideration, it appears that Protestants exhibited a greater degree of enlightenment and a lesser degree of partisanship toward the colonial state in comparison to Catholics. However, both groups were aligned in their shared worldview, which inherently embraced the notion

[49] Located with the approval of the native chiefs, these bodies were however often imposed with violence, and were finally abandoned in 1914.

of white superiority over blackness. Even if they campaigned against human rights abuses in the colony, they never questioned colonial practice itself, with all the elements it entailed, such as racial segregation (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 40).

At the onset of the 1930s, there was a significant escalation in tensions. As a matter of fact, in 1933, the Protestant Council of Congo accused the colonial government of being thoroughly dominated by the Catholic Church. This disparity is even evident observing their late establishment of higher education institutions[50] (Lygunda Li-M 2018, chapter 4). Furthermore, the government drew up a formal instruction forbidding pupils in Protestant schools from coming into contact with those in Catholic schools, in an attempt to prevent the latter from losing their faith. The colonial administration's stance was that only the Christian Catholic religion could effect a transformation in the native mentality, instilling a sense of duty, respect for authority, and loyalty to Belgium (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 271). It was subsequent to the intervention of the International Missionary Council, which brought the matter to the attention of the Belgian government, that the situation began to improve[51].

Following the war, a shift in political dynamics enabled the gradual rapprochement between Catholics and Protestants. In 1946, the Belgian Colonial Minister's decision to provide financial support to the efforts of foreign missions in the field of education in the Congo helped to further stabilize their relationships. Furthermore, the circumstance of a liberal-socialist coalition government in power in Belgium, between 1954 and 1958, resulted in the end of the long period in Africa during which the colonial government and the Catholic missions regarded their interests as identical[52](Baëta 2018, 99-100).

2.1.3. *The Congo Reform Movement and the Blindness to Violation of Human Rights*

The role of religion in the context of the atrocities perpetuated in the Congo is a contentious issue, as it has been both a veil of silence and a form of resistance. The work of missionaries,

[50] Only in 1956, it was possible to establish the Protestant University, whose course in theology opened in 1960, while the Catholic University of Lovanium was almost celebrating its 10th anniversary.
[51] This intervention followed the initiation of a public campaign in England and the USA, which was launched in response to the persecution of Protestant missions.
[52] Nevertheless, many Protestants continued to fear and distrust Catholics in the years following the war and some protestant missions were even skeptical towards the whole ecumenical movement, resulting indeed in the withdrawal of the CPC from the International Missionary Council, over the issue of its integration into the *Conseil Mondial des Églises* (World Council of Churches).

representing both Catholic and Protestant faiths, has been instrumental in providing first-hand accounts of the brutality of the Leopoldian regime and the Belgian rule in the Congo, as well as in raising global awareness of the issue. Despite the fact that Catholics were mainly Belgian and were also loyal supporters of the king's regime thanks to reciprocal favors[53], and were not exempt from engaging in unethical behavior[54], some of them still condemned the government's actions, particularly with regard to the imposition of forced labor and the extraction of rubber (Hochschild 1999, 135). On the other hand, they were fierce critics of African traditions and practices, and strongly advocated against bride wealth, polygyny, breastfeeding methods, gender ideologies, and more (Likaka 2009, 50).

It is important to note that, disregarding the inconsistency of the Protestant missionaries, the movement that led to the denunciation of Leopold's misdeeds was managed by the Protestant Church and took form through the Congo Reform Association (CRA). The Congo Reform movement was one of the first modern international human rights campaigns, which infused new life into the humanitarianism that led to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade in the early 19th century, courageously challenging Leopold's power, confronting him with his responsibilities and initiating the process that would lead to the Belgian reprise in 1908 (Macola 2021, 93).

The CRA was established in 1904 by E.D. Morel and Roger Casement, with additional contributions from Dr Henry Grattan Guinness. Their report, published in 1904, was a key factor in Leopold's withdrawal of the Congo Free State in 1908. E. D. Morel's contributions to the activities and campaigning of the CRA were significant. His initial involvement in the anti-King Leopold II campaign in the Congo Free State was prompted by his awareness of the atrocities perpetrated against the African population[55]. Morel's articles provided the most thorough account of what he termed the 'Congo Scandal.' He argued that the atrocities in the Congo were the inevitable result of a system in place there that denied the native the right to free trade and, therefore, forced him to engage in forced labor (Cline 1963, 46-56).

The missionaries played a pivotal role in disseminating information about the atrocities that occurred throughout Europe and North America. This was achieved by means of delivering a substantial

[53] Leopold provided substantial financial support to the Catholic Church, leveraging this financial influence on occasions to deploy priests (almost as if they were military personnel) to regions where he sought to consolidate his authority.

[54] At the time, some Catholic missionary stations were dedicated to the care of orphans, although in practice these were children who had been stolen from their families, which in Africa was a broader concept, and often because the parents had been victims of the *Force Publique.*

[55] This awareness arose during his employment at a shipping firm, where he observed the offloading of raw materials and the loading of weapons onto ships returning from the Congo. Thanks to his skills as a journalist, Morel embarked on a dedicated campaign to expose the regime, producing a series of articles on the subject.

number of lectures, using images of mutilated Congolese natives and other disturbing incidents. It was especially the British, American, and Swedish missionaries that contributed to Morel's work denouncing King Leopold's rule[56], collecting for years witnesses of FP raids, burned villages, rubber slavery, and brutal murders (Hochschild 1999, 191). This campaign marked the start of Belgium's growing mistrust towards Protestant missions, setting in motion the events that would ultimately lead to Leopold's downfall.

The publication of the Casement Report by the British Foreign Office in 1904 and the protracted release of the Report of the Commission of Inquiry by the Congo Free State in 1905 exposed several allegations, placing Catholic representatives in a challenging dilemma. They were confronted with the task of disassociating themselves from these assertions while concurrently justifying their prior endorsement of the regime. The most frequently invoked justification was a lack of awareness regarding the specifics and the facts of the allegations. However, various factors, including the limited number of Catholic missionaries in the territory, the dispersed location of these missions, and the inadequate communication infrastructure, suggested that the missionaries might not have been aware of the severity of the abuses occurring elsewhere.

During that period, the missionary presence was sparse, with approximately two hundred missionaries distributed across thirty-five missions, and none of these missions were located in the regions where the worst abuses were taking place. Still, the whole Reform movement came to be identified as Protestant-inspired, increasing opposition and competition between Christians and Protestants. However, despite initial support for the regime after the publication of the Commission of Inquiry's report, it provoked hostility from the Church, mainly because these reports contained harsh criticism of the Catholic missions (Cline 1963, 50-54).

Nonetheless, even if Protestant missionary societies remained long silent until 1903, individual missionaries were among the earliest critics of the regime. The initial documentation of Protestant missionaries' observations on the treatment of Africans by the colonial state emerged as early as the late 1890s (Lösing 2020, 81-84). This includes accounts by anonymous sources, believed to be members of the British Baptist Missionary Society, who reported cases of arbitrary violence and atrocities, including mutilations, as a means of coercing the payment of rubber and ivory tributes[57].

[56] Protestant aid helped publicize the systematic violence perpetrated against Congolese workers by rubber concessionaires and the colonial military force, the Force Publique. Kenny, Gale, and Tisa Wenger. 2020. "Church, State, and 'Native Liberty' in the Belgian Congo." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 62 (1): 156–85. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417519000446, 157.

[57] Moreover, John B. Murphy of the American Baptist Missionary Union articulated the 'horrors' with particularity, including the taking of hostages among Christianized Africans and the amputation of hands.

As these appeals began to evoke general international disquiet, Leopold's Congo Free State sought to subvert this by attacking the repression of these Protestant missionary bodies (Lösing 2020, 81-82). However, accusations of mistreatment of the indigenous population persisted throughout the period of Belgian rule. During these years, apart from the collection of wild resources and mining, the heavy construction of infrastructure throughout the country, with roads, buildings, and railways, requested a high supply of human labor. In the meanwhile, Protestant missionaries documented high mortality among African workers.

Since the majority of the Protestant missionaries were not under state rule, they were eyewitnesses to the abuses of the Congo enterprise and offered more dramatic accounts of the demographic impact of the railway's construction than government records. Albeit the evidence of these missionaries occasionally overstated the consequences of the railway on demographics, their depictions of the African workers' condition under colonial rule were not implausible or entirely unrelated to the actual conditions (Likaka 2009, 40-41). In conclusion, it is important to note the scarcity of information regarding subsequent denunciations by missionaries during the period of Belgian colonialism. The prevailing focus of scholars has been on the remarkable phenomenon of the Congo Reform Movement, which, despite its activities extending until approximately 1913, did not persist in its denunciations in subsequent years.

2.1.4. *The White Fathers' Evangelization Spoke 'Black Languages'*

The "scramble for Africa" reached its peak at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, ending with the post-World War One stripping away of German colonies. During this period, the Society of Missionaries of Africa, also known as the White Fathers due to their white robes, established the foundation for their missionary work in Africa. Cardinal Charles-Martial Allemand-Lavigerie, then Archbishop of Algiers, was the founder the founder of this Catholic missionary society, that had established posts in the Great Lakes region since the late 1870s, precisely in 1868. The White Fathers were officially known as the Society of Missionaries in Africa. Previously, on 15 May 1865, Lavigerie, bishop of Nancy (France), arrived in Algiers, where he was appointed archbishop. He was forty-one years old and remained in charge of the local Church until his death in 1892. In the context of this new mission, he founded two missionary institutes for Africa: the *Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa* and the *Missionaries of Africa*. The White Fathers were

the first Europeans to enter Rwanda in 1879[58]. As for neighboring Burundi, the first mission was founded by the White Fathers in 1879 on the shores of Lake Tanganyika (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 89-90).

Cardinal Lavigerie was one of the greatest supporters of the fight against the slave trade, who in 1888 launched a public campaign against the slave trade in East Africa, which gave new impetus to abolitionist movements in France, Belgium, and Britain. Lavigerie argued for a crusade against the so-called 'Arab' slave empires in East Africa on an inspirational speaking tour of Europe, which led to the establishment of new 'Anti-Slavery societies' in various European states (Cline 1963, 46-47). This abolitionist movement's rhetoric was combined with imperialistic notions and anti-Muslim polemics. Notwithstanding this, the international community agreed in Brussels upon the General Act of the Brussels Anti-Slavery Conference[59] (Lösing 2020, 70). On the other hand, the same Act promised to " *increase their welfare; to raise them to civilization and bring about the extinction of barbarous customs, such as cannibalism, and human sacrifices*".[60]

According to Lavigerie, the fundamental principle of the Evangelical mission was to 'civilize' African man by distancing him from his material and physical needs, in a manner that did not recognize the integrity of the individual as a human being composed of needs related to his cultural sphere. Clearly, this vision ignored the importance of man's economic, cultural, and scientific emancipation, fitting in nicely with ongoing colonial rule. Their mission was built around Christian doctrine, the healing of souls, and conversion[61] (Northrup 1988, 310-311). One consequence of this philosophy was that it shaped behavior and mentality among African Christians. Therefore, the indigenous hierarchy, after the departure of the missionaries, was left with a colonial tutelage structure that had ignored the absence of local autonomy, starting with the churches.

The absence of profitable economic structures, the non-integration of the missionaries into the dynamics of local development, and the paternalistic management of the missions led to a situation where the Church, following the departure of the European missionaries, struggled to adapt and to

[58] The first attempts at evangelization were unsuccessful, to the point that two fathers were even killed by the population in Rumonge.

[59] The signatory parties were the Congo Free State, the United Kingdom, France, the German Empire, the Kingdom of Portugal, the Kingdom of Italy, The Kingdom of Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium, the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary, Sweden-Norway, Denmark, the Ottoman Empire, hence the Berlin powers, and the United States, Zanzibar, and Persia.

[60] General Act of Brussels, 2 July 1890, https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000001- 0134.pdf, art. II.

[61] In 1879 he wrote the 'handbook': "Instructions to the Missionaries of Central Africa'. He highlighted the pivotal role of converting civil rulers first, as a means of fostering the expansion of Christianity in Europe, highlighting its history from the time of Constantine onwards.

carry on a proper process of development and emancipation of the local populations. This fostered dependence, both spiritual and material, on the former missionaries, and delayed the process of decolonization, which also affected the African churches (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 111-112).

European missionaries employed various means to achieve their goal of converting pagan populations and gaining acceptance. One of the most potent methods was learning local languages and Lavigerie was one of the greatest supporters of this method (Fabian 1983, 173-174). In the context of the study of missions in Congo, this factor must not be underestimated. Therefore, a brief general introduction is necessary. Evangelization was pursued also along different dialects and languages, fueling ethnic nationalism. However, in cases like the Bakongo, it fostered unity through the unification of the Kikongo language, better known as the Abako. (Lemarchand 2023, 127-130). The rationale behind it was that using French as the official language of the colony's evangelization was impractical. Catholic missionaries did not support the government's Francophone efforts, since their educational aim was the conversion of the Congolese, and education in French did not align with their goal of creating a Christian society in Africa. The majority of Catholics interested in mass conversion opted for regional languages such as Kikongo, Swahili, Tshiluba, or Lingala, while Protestants, focusing on individual conversion, selected the locally spoken dialect near each mission post.
Catholic missionaries started to pay more attention to local languages at the beginning of the 20th century, to compete with Protestants, who even translated the Scriptures into the local vernaculars. The White Fathers, who were among the first missionary societies to promote education, started to train the African clergy in the 1890s, moving directly from Swahili to Latin, and bypassing French (Yates 1980, 268-271). Lavigerie strongly supported this methodology[62], advancing the argument that mastery of the indigenous language was of paramount importance for the effective dissemination of Christian doctrine, and consequently, missionaries needed to receive the most comprehensive and rapid training possible to facilitate the transmission of religious teachings (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 99-101). The way to make evangelization an intense and lasting process for the Indigenous people was precisely to patronize their language to perfection, a fundamental task of the missionary to transmit his message further and integrate it better in the context in which he worked[63].

[62] In his view, knowledge of the indigenous language was the prerequisite for any evangelization, because it was the only way to make a profound impact. For him too, the missionary, rather than flattering himself with rapid results, must arm himself with patience, and above all not be discouraged by the relapses of converts.
[63] The missionaries were required to demonstrate patience and not allow themselves to become discouraged by the convert relapsing. According to Cardinal Lavigerie, "*La connaissance de la langue indigène est pour lui le préalable de toute évangélisation, car seule elle permet une action profonde. Pour lui aussi le missionnaire, plutôt que de se flatter des résultats rapides, doit s'armer de patience, et surtout ne pas se découragerdes rechutes des convertis*"[63]. Raoul, Émilienne. 2020. *L'Oeuvre Des Missionnaires Catholiques Dans l'Éducation Au Congo (1880-1965).* Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 420.

2.1.5. *Nationalism Turns Religious: the Kimbanguist Movement*

Indigenous religious movements arose in the Democratic Republic of Congo during the colonial period, probably as a consequence of the Congolese population's lack of agency in shaping the events during Belgian colonial rule. In the Lower Congo region, a long-standing tradition of political mobilization through religious expression existed, with origins dating back to the 18th century. The Congolese population wanted to replace a European importation with a church of their own, a desire that led to the organization of messianic and nativistic movements like Kimbanguism[64], Kitawala, Bokoleale, and many others. However, among them all, the best known of these controversial messianic currents was Kimbanguism – also known as the Prophet Movement – initiated by the "prophet" Simon Kimbangu in 1921 (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 166-168).

Kibanguism became a subversive movement against traditions, colonial frontiers, and missions, constituting a true nationalism of religious essence, that sought its expression within a church (Maurel 1992, 236-238). Kimbangu was a former catechist of Bakongo origins who was educated at the Protestant mission of Ngombe-Lutete. Supposedly, God appeared to Kimbagu in visions and asked him to "preach the gospel of liberation from all forms of oppression, including sorcery, other negative customs, and white domination" (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 48).

This magical-religious movement's aim was the establishment of an independent and autonomous African church, which would incorporate into its dogma some of the elements contained in the Bible[65]. But it was also, at least in its latent forms, a spontaneous movement of resistance, opposed to European domination. This peculiar combination of conservatism, nationalist, and anti-white elements is strongly expressed in some of the "heavenly songs" written by Kimbangu's followers, and in their inclination to take whatever messages of freedom could be read into the Bible (Lemarchand 2023, 169-170).

The movement quickly spread in the Lower Congo, leading to thousands of workers from government offices, private companies, and affluent households leaving their jobs to attend the gatherings at

[64] Kimbanguism was also known as Kintwadi, Ngunzism, the Disciples of Simon Kimbangu, and, most recently, as the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by Simon Kimbangu.

[65] In fact, according to his many converts, Kimbangu was the 'chosen one' who would expel the colonizers and thus emerge as the 'ruler of Africa'. According to certain interpretations, he was the rightful successor to the throne of the old kingdom of the Congo.

Nkamba, where the new prophet preached about racial pride, liberation, and self-reliance. His word arrived even in relegation camps, spreading to all political prisoners.

As it is easily predictable, the colonial powers, namely the state, the Catholic Church, and major private enterprises, responded strongly. The colonial authorities viewed Kimbanguism as a threat to public order and stability in the region and, therefore, acted swiftly to muzzle the movement. The law granted the administrative authorities the right to neutralize any individual or group of individuals threatening public safety and order, in accordance with the decrees of 3 June 1906 and 5 July 1910, which were later replaced by the decree of 17 June 1958.

In general, these decrees ordered the dissolution of numerous indigenous sects and associations (Balaamo Mokelwa 2009, 180-185). This led to the arrest of Kimbangu, along with 248 of his disciples, for promoting the subversive ideas of Pan-Africanism. He was then put on trial and sentenced to death for sedition, even though, in the end, he was commuted to life imprisonment in the notorious Kasapa Prison in Lubumbashi, where he remained until his death in 1951.

His arrest followed the prosecution of all his followers between 1921 and 1959 (Leslie 2019, 75).

Notwithstanding this, his popularity never stopped growing, leading to the creation of several political-religious movements inspired by him. Among these figured: 'Ngounzaism' (1935), 'Salvationism' (1936–38), 'Mpadism' or 'Khakism' (1939–46), 'Nzambi Malembe' (1948), and the Kitawala, which spread quickly in eastern Congo and significantly motivated African resistance. In 1959, shortly before independence, Belgium legally recognized the *Eglise de Jésus-Christ sur la terre par le prophète Simon Kimbangu* (EJCSK), which, still today, represents the third major religious community in the Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 49-51).

Among the later created religious messianic movements, Kitawala, also known as the Watch Tower Movement, had a major importance in the eastern part of the Congo. It was founded in the United States in 1874 by Charles Taze Russell, and propagated abroad than to the work of the Jewish judge, J. E. Rutherford. Starting to arrive in South Africa, it subsequently spread to Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Angola, and the Belgian Congo. The similarity with Kimbanguism lies in its reliance on the Bible and its refusal of imported religions. Although it did not propose a true cultural change and merely represented a sort of philosophy of history, in the 1930s, it experienced a growing expansion, arriving in the rural areas of Katanga, the Orientale Province, and the Kivu. This movement met as well brutal oppression after an uprising of its followers, which led to the death of 58 rebels and the arrest of 379 suspects (Lemarchand 2023, 171-172).

The relevance of acknowledging the existence of these numerous messianic movements lies in their influence on the political developments of the societies in Congo. Due to colonial influence and control, the regular channels of political expression were repressed, leading to a growing sense of tension and stress. These movements fueled social and political unrest on the basis of their nationalist sentiments. Furthermore, in certain instances, a curious process of identification occurred whereby the spiritual and religious qualities attributed to a prophet were, in fact, ascribed to a political leader, thereby adding an aura of sanctity to their personal reputation.

This phenomenon can be even observed in the Leopoldville riots of 1959, where the figure of Kasavubu was venerated and followed since he was considered to be the reincarnation of Kimbangu. In fact, it was through its association with the Kimbanguist doctrine that the Abako political movement promoted itself and sought to attract support and increase its ranks. There was a strong nationalist impulse among the population, precisely because the Kimbanguist faith appealed to aspects of Bakongo culture (Gondola 2002, 93-96).

2.2. *The Complex Alliance of Church and State in the Belgian Congo*

The Catholic missions in the Congo operated as a veritable "State Church," constituting one of the three pillars of the Belgian colonial state. Mission's work was so entrenched that, at the end of the colonial period, by 1958, 80 percent of the 5.3 million Christians were Catholics, and the church maintained over 900 mission posts, 6,000 white missionaries, around 500 African priests, and 25,000 lay catechists (Young 2015, 12-13). In addition, Catholic schools educated 50 percent of secondary school students, and the Church ran more than 1,000 medical facilities, including hospitals, dispensaries, and leprosariums (Carney 2014, 100). Nevertheless, the true strength of the Church during this period of colonial history is primarily rooted in its dominion over the educational apparatus. Initially bestowed upon them as a quasi-monopoly by the state, the latter would subsequently endeavor to revoke it, though without success.

The ensuing dynamic, whereby collaboration and conflict coexisted, will be delineated in the following discourse. An understanding of the educational system framework in Belgian Congo is fundamental for the comprehension of the Congolese political awakening, that finally emerged in the late 1950s. The school system also proved instrumental in shaping the country's relationship with the State. Finally, missions' behavior at the turn of independence is observed. Once again, the Church was faced with a dilemma. Fearing to lose its status, it was torn between support and fear, conflicted between a conservative and progressive stance.

2.2.1. *State Protection over the Church in the Belgian Congo*

In order to comprehend the quantitative representation of the state of the missions at the conclusion of the Belgian Congo period, it is instructive to consider the numerical increase in the number of missionaries and the outcomes of their work of conversion. At the beginning of Belgian colonial rule, in 1908, there were approximately 587 missionaries of all denominations, while, in 1907, Protestant missionaries accounted for only 187. By 1908, the Catholics had around 125.000 converts and the Protestants counted to 70.000 (Gann 2015, 212). The period between 1891 and 1931 saw a significant increase in the number of Catholic missionaries in the Congo, rising from 11 to 1,870. In contrast, the number of Protestant missionaries increased only marginally, from 79 to 740. As demonstrated in the 1954 statistics, there were 6,335 missionaries in the Congo, of whom 4,978 adhered to Catholicism. In that same year, Catholic missions accounted for 28.05 percent of the total Congolese population among their baptized adherents, while Protestant missions accounted for only 5.72 percent (Lemarchand 2023, 123).

While the Berlin Act formally granted equal standing to all Christian orders, broader historical circumstances and the prevailing national interests of Belgium ultimately led to the development and growth of Catholic orders[66]. This may have happened since the Berlin Act provided a very general overview of the economic policies that were to be adopted towards religious institutions and enterprises and was easy to grant favorable conditions for their territorial and demographic expansion to the Catholic mission[67] (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 205-212). In the context of the Belgian regime, the Catholic missions, in conjunction with the Catholic party (*Parti Social Chrétien*), wielded considerable influence over the political affairs of the state. In fact, as previously stated, the administration of the colony can be regarded as overseen by a 'triumvirate' comprising the colonial administration, private corporations, and the Roman Catholic missions.
Observing the internal political landscape of Belgium, it is pertinent to bear in mind that, in the period between 1908 and 1945, three out of the nineteen ministers were liberals, while the remaining sixteen ministers were members of the Catholic parties. Moreover, the Socialist Party demonstrated minimal

[66] It is relevant to remember that, contrary to the first evangelizing wave, the missionary movement of the nineteenth century introduced the same sectoral divisions generated by the Reformation to the African continent.
[67] It is clear that these concessions went far beyond the provisions of the Act, which instead provided for the equal treatment of all Christian denominations.

engagement with colonial affairs, entrusting the matter to the center and right, even during periods of coalition with these factions (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 56-57). These political changes were indicative of the prevailing internal tensions in Belgium, characterized by a liberal secularism that was anti-religious in nature yet accommodating towards Protestants, as it did not openly favor Catholics. Concurrently, there was a Catholic-inspired secularism that explicitly articulated the constitutional values of religious freedom and the separation of church and state in a clear Catholic perspective (Kenny and Wenger 2020, 171-172).

Belgium conceived Christian and human development in Congo as a national mission that necessitated the collaboration of the Church. Therefore, the preferential policy initiated by Leopold, which favored financially and socially the Belgian and Catholic national missions over the Protestant ones, was substantially resumed during the Belgian colonial regime (Gondola 2002, 82). In fact, the first administration of Belgium's rule in 1908, headed by Minister of Colonies Renkin, followed the same course as Leopold's policy, favoring the Catholic Church. The purpose behind the emphasis on Christian missions was the belief that education could be used to 'tame' the Congolese people. It is evident that the Church, with its morals, encouraged the locals to accept the civilizing mission of colonization of their own free will, thus facilitating Belgium's control and order of the territory (Kisangani 2022, 64).

In this context, starting in 1926, the Belgian state began to implement the principle of direct subsidization of conventional schools in Congo. In fact, the *Convention Scolaire* of 1925 enabled several missionaries involved in education to receive a state salary. Thus, the relationship between the colonial state and the mission schools became more formalized, reflecting a shift toward state involvement in educational funding (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 210). However, according to some testimonies, missionary resources were scarce since most contributions came from middle and lower-middle-class supporters overseas (Gann 2015, 209). As a matter of fact, the missions had a significant economic function, originating from the fundamental need for self-sufficiency. This led to the cultivation of gardens and the breeding of small animals, while the establishment of schools and care centers contributed to the transition from a rudimentary agricultural economy to an almost industrial level[68] (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 109).

[68] Despite the validity of these reasons, it is evident that numerous missions progressively became real agricultural and craft businesses, encompassing domains such as carpentry, mechanics, printing, and carpet manufacturing, thanks to cheap labor.

Clearly, it is important to specify that the financial and administrative aid from the state was only intended for national missions, i.e., mission companies based in Belgium and directed to Belgians. However, it would be inaccurate to underestimate the assistance they enjoyed. In addition to the subsidy from the annual budget, the religious missions received a special grant each year in accordance with paragraphs 3, 4, and 5 of Article 4 of the Supplementary Act to the Treaty of the Congo Free State's cession to Belgium of 5 March 1908. According to this article, a special fund of 50 million francs was created, to be paid in fifteen annual installments, the first of 3,800,000 francs and each of the other fourteen of 3,300,000 francs. Although this fund was formally designated for the benefit of the King, it was specified that it was also to be used for 'purposes relating to the Congo, for various works for the benefit of the Congo, for the benefit and welfare of the natives and for the benefit of whites who have served well in Africa'.
Furthermore, a range of exemptions were applicable to the missions, including those related to land taxes, personnel taxes, real estate transaction taxes, customs taxes, forestry taxes, and special transfer duties (Balaamo Mokelwa 2009, 167-169).

From 1908 to 1960, seven of the ten governors-general who served under the Belgian regime were Catholic[69] (Gann 2015, 178-179). From 1922 onwards, under the Minister of Colonies Louis Franck, a member of the Liberal Party, the government repeatedly reaffirmed its preference for the Catholic and Belgian missionaries, the so-called national missions, at the expense of foreign missions and Protestant schools. It is important to note that the government did not establish an official school framework. The Catholic missions interpreted this de facto monopoly as an inalienable right, thus opposing in the future the establishment of secular schools in the Congo (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 49). Franck asserted that the Catholic Church was the only institution capable of effecting a transformation in the mentality of the indigenous populace, and of inculcating in them a sense of conscience and, consequently, loyalty to the Belgian state (Van Reybrouck 2014, 141). However, anticipating a change in government school policy and given the Decree that gave the indigenous Circumscriptions prerogatives in school matters, the First Conference of Ordinaries defined a preventive policy against school dualism. In the early 20th century, Franck established a specialized body, the Commission for Education, with the objective of standardizing educational programs to suit the rural environment.

[69] The exceptions to this were Maurice Lippens, an anticlerical Liberal who was in office during the Franck ministry (1918-1924), Eugene Jungers, who was not affiliated to any religion, and Hendrik Cornells, a Socialist and the final governor-general.

Franck's agenda was designed with the intention of restoring power and authority to traditional leaders, however, the policy contained inconsistencies. This initiative recommended the use of African languages in the instruction of students, emphasized agricultural practices, and incorporated educational initiatives for girls (Boyle 1995, 454). Subsequent innovations were introduced in 1946, when the liberal Minister of the Colonies, R. Godding sought to end the disadvantaged status of Protestant missions (Vanthemsche 2012, 50). He weakened the Catholic monopoly by creating the first official secular schools in Congo, which were initially reserved only for Europeans.
However, it was not until 1950 that a small number of Congolese were granted admission (Boyle 1995, 455-456). The reform thus brought to an end the ambiguous system of official congregational schools, created by the state yet run by Catholic missions. The reform also formally recognized Protestant schools and paved the way for state subsidies to be allocated to them. However, due to his brief one-year tenure, Godding was unable to effectively challenge the influence of the Catholic Missions (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 48).

Due to the Church's historical dominance in the field of education, which spanned over half a century, a significant correlation between Christianity, education, and social status emerged. Prior to 1954, obtaining a rudimentary education was almost exclusively possible through missionary schools, whether Catholic or Protestant. Yet, within the social structure established by colonial governance, it was exclusively the literate individual who held a position of prominence and who was better equipped to evade the sporadic arbitrary measures of colonial agents. These privileges were often secured through service to the missionaries as a teacher or catechist, or through employment with the government or within commercial enterprises.
Thus, the safest path to ascend the new social scale brought about by colonial domination was by becoming a Christian. Not surprisingly, a type of Christianity that we might call ‘sociological’ grew up (Kachama-Nkoy 1961, 303). The following section will provide a more detailed examination of the school system.

2.2.2. *Colonial Education and its Linkages to the Emergence of an Educated Élite*

Regarding the educational mission of the church, according to Lemarchand (2023), it was a ‘failed mission’. Consistent with a part of the Congolese population, the clergy was responsible for depriving the Congolese of higher education opportunities, with the intention of hindering their political progress. The degree to which the population had access to educational opportunities has

been identified as a significant contributing factor to the emergence of nationalism within the country, although this influence was not as pronounced as in other African states. Indeed, it is noteworthy that numerous leaders who have been instrumental in marking the political awakening of the nation have achieved relatively limited levels of education, often not extending beyond secondary school. This attitude towards education, despite Belgium's declaration of higher African literacy in Congo, could be linked to their paternalist colonial need to favor the teaching of technical skills rather than literature. (Lemarchand 2023, 132-133).

An examination of the period of Belgian colonial rule reveals that, between 1930 and 1934, the proportion of the school-age population enrolled in education was a mere 12%. Between 1950 and 1954, this figure rose to 37%, and in 1959, of the 3,040,000 children aged between 5 and 14, 1,700,000 attended primary school, i.e. 56% of the total. During the period 1954-1959, the annual percentage increase in the number of primary school pupils rose from 6% to 10%, one of the highest growth rates in the world. Moving to the independence period, the number of students in higher education was reduced. There were 829 university students in the Congo and a further 300 in Belgium in 1960. And, infamously, in June 1960, there were only 20 graduating students in DR Congo. (Kachama-Nkoy 1961, 306-307). In addition to the existing missionary education system, there was an extensive system of schools for the benefit of the children of European settlers in the area, established in 1946 during the rule of Minister of Colonies Godding. Access to these schools became increasingly important for the African elite, especially after the war. Naturally, there was strong resistance to the admission of young Congolese. Nonetheless, in 1950, as mentioned before, Congolese children were granted access for the first time, albeit in very limited numbers.
The admission procedures, overseen by designated committees, were characterized by a lack of dignity and fairness. A range of criteria were evaluated, encompassing aspects such as the family's economic status and personal hygiene. The consequence of this 'opening' was that, in 1953, 21 African students were admitted to European schools, and by 1959, this figure had increased to slightly over 1,400. However, several students were expelled for absurd reasons related to personal hygiene and health (Young 2015, 93-94).

The first educational resources extending beyond the biblical level of elementary reading and mathematics were provided with the institution of clerical schools in Boma in 1906 and Leopoldville in 1907. Moreover, an agricultural school was founded in Stanleyville in 1908. In 1948, aside from several large seminaries, only one school, ranging beyond the secondary level, for medical and

agricultural assistants existed in Kisantu. At the time of independence, there were 3.000 former students of the Catholic seminaries, and 350 students enrolled in the two universities.
However, it is relevant to note the number of technical studies graduates, which amounted to almost 500 Congolese, among technicians, assistants from different fields, administrative specialists, and social workers (Young 2015, 199-200). In 1924, for the first time, it was established a Belgian educational system, based on the guidance of a special commission that consisted of representatives from the government and the mission.
The consensus was reached on a form of education mainly based on vocational and agricultural training and consisted of a two-year primary course (*écoles primaires du premier degré*), coupled with a three-year higher primary course focusing on vocational training. After that, only the most excellent students had the privilege to attend secondary education in the *écoles spéciales pour la formation de rélite* (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 170-173).

This system of secondary education for meritorious students was introduced by Belgium in 1948. It was divided into 'general secondary schools' and 'special secondary schools', depending on whether they focused on the humanities or mathematics and science (Makiobo 2004, 22-23). Among the educational panorama, the only schools that performed higher literate education were the catholic church's schools for the training of the African clergy. However, in 1958 only one student out of 83 had the chance to attend a secondary school. Regarding the opportunity of studying abroad, it was not until 1952 that a student was admitted to the University of Louvain, reaching a number of five students in 1955.
The first black student was called Thomas Kanza. By 1958, the University of Brussels had only three Congolese students enrolled, while the University of Liège welcomed its first Congolese student that same year (Lemarchand 2023, 134-142). In Congo, in 1954, the Church established Lovanium University near Leopoldville, and in 1956, the Liberal-Socialist government created the State University of Elizabethville. The Protestants established a university in Stanleyville in the mid-1960s (MacGaffey 1982, 245). However, at this point, less than 200 Congolese students were graduating from the *humanités* cycle in secondary school, which allowed them to be eligible for university. In 1960, the total number of Congolese having graduated from University was 30 (Young 2015, 94).

Generally, lessons were taught in the native language, as was encouraged by the Belgian government, and if there were multiple idioms in the same territory, the most important dialect among the tribes in the area was to be used. Therefore, French was studied only as a foreign language. This system later raised a feeling that the use of dialects was preventing the population from reaching

higher intellectual improvements. Another aspect to take into account is that education was not imparted in a homogeneous manner. That is to say, it was not delivered in territories where evangelical missions did not arrive, or in population centers far from the core of economic activities. With respect to this, certain ethnic groups were favored, including the Bakongo, who were among the first to receive missionary instruction, and the Baluba, who sought their protection against Muslim slave traders (Gann 2015, 210).

What emerges from these two aspects is that education in the colonial context became deeply entangled with both ethnic divisions and the shaping of nationalist sentiments. Nationalist sentiment was certainly also curbed by the absence of a real elite of intellectuals, although it is important to mention the existence of the *évolués*.

The *évolués* were a class produced by missions' work in education, whose name was used in the colonial era to refer to native Africans who had "evolved" through education or assimilation and accepted European values and patterns of behavior (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 62). This new elite stood alongside an existing artisan and working-class elite, who was considered favorable to the vision of an Indigenous society of Christian faith. According to Maurel (1992), the *évolués* could be considered as falling within the spectrum of the 'indisputable successes' of the Belgian colonial domination period, when considered in relation to the process of colonizing the minds of the black elite. The author asserts that during the 1930s and 1940s, the colonizer effectively imposed his frame of reference and ideological values on the *évolués*, facilitated by the Catholic Church's fundamental role in instilling a capitalist ideological conception in its students (Maurel 1992, 53-54). In addition, as stated in the work of Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon (2013, 57), the *évolués* often acted as 'intermediaries' between Belgium and the Congolese society.

On the other hand, the *évolués*, thanks to a relatively greater education, tended to assert their autonomy *vis-à-vis* both the colonial government and the missions. The creation of these new identities, paralleled by increased industrialization and urbanization in the inter-war period, was a further element of concern for the Church, which perceived them as threats to the resilience and endurance of the project of Indigenous Christian society. These new elites aspired, in particular, to more advanced intellectual education and a deeper, if not complete, integration into the dominant colonial society (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 79-80).

Faced with the prospect of marginalization, the missionaries devised a reform of the Apostolate specifically for the *évolués*, with the aim of providing them with a more profound human and religious formation. Consequently, they advocated for the consolidation or establishment of associative post-schooling structures, such as study circles and alumni associations. However, these structures were

subject to significant clerical influence. This element of novelty was a contributing factor to a rupture in relations between church and state, as it highlighted a divergence in their respective interests. In fact, Rome's representative, the Apostolic Delegate, stressed the urgency of addressing the rapid development of black people and their new aspirations to become more educated and responsible in colonial society. He warned that failure to do so would risk the Church and the Catholic religion losing all possibility of influence and action on the African elite and society (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 34-39).

2.2.3. *From the 'Lutte Scolaire' to the 'Prise de Conscience'*

A partial rupture in the close relationship between the state and the church occurred during the Cold War period, when, between 1954 and 1958, the alliance parties in the Belgian government mutually agreed on their anti-clerical tendencies, thereby generating significant tensions. When Auguste Buisseret assumed the role of Colonial Minister in 1954[70], he demonstrated a resolute commitment to the reform of the education system in Congo, which constituted the backbone of the missions' program. Consequently, he established a special investigation group, which severely criticized the performance of the mission (Boyle 1995, 458-459). As a result, he proposed the establishment of a network of secular schools for African children, as well as reductions in funding for the Christian churches.

This proposal was formalized by a written letter in December 1954, informing the Episcopate of the reduction of government aid to mission schools. Interpreted as a unilateral break with the 1906 Convention, the Church responded with an ultimatum: it threatened to close its entire school system. As a result, the Minister was forced to retreat and decided to introduce only a few state schools for Africans in the main urban centers. His decision was welcomed positively by a large part of the Congolese elite, who saw it as a potential alternative to missionary education (Young 2015, 144). Nevertheless, the *Lutte Scolaire* (School War), which opposed the state and the church in the years between 1954 and 1956, resulted in an increase in subsidies for Protestant educational institutions.

[70] It has to be specified that, in 1953, secret negotiations took place between the Belgian socialist party and the Vatican, in order to replace the 1906 Concordat, on the topic of colonial education. The resulting treaty, signed in December I953 by the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs and a Vatican representative, formally reduced the power of the Catholics in Belgium over the administration of the church in Congo. The treaty issue fueled an already bitter *guerre scolaire* in Belgium concerning subsidies for parochial schools. In 1954, a change in the parliamentary majority prevented the agreement from being adopted.

According to (Boyle 1995, 458), the *Lutte Scolaire* was therefore unique, not only because it focused on colonial education, but also because it planted seeds of distrust among three groups: the colonial administration, the missionaries, and the population. At a crucial moment for the future of the Congo, this 'war' brought church and state into an unexpected clash over colonial social policy. This period marked a rupture, as Christian missions believed that secular education risked exposing Africans with a strong religious conviction to agnosticism and turning them into individuals with anarchist tendencies. However, the compromise found in 1956 sanctioned the end of the conflict. It confirmed the advent of secular schools and the allocation of subsidies to Protestant and Catholic schools (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 48-52). This date marks the end of the Catholic Missions' monopoly on schools.

A noteworthy point was posited by Mukanya Kaninda-Muana (2008), who held that the évolués, faced with the condition of parity introduced by the newly equalized Protestant and Catholic schools, abandoned the claim of assimilation to whites or institutionalized social distance from the Congolese masses. The result, according to the author, was that Catholics, whether liberal or anti-clerical, tended to engage in ethnic-tribal associations. However, despite tribalist tendencies, they participated in the modernization of the ethnic concept in a fast-developing cosmopolitan urban environment (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 56).

In those years, the Vatican became aware of the dangers posed by the continued presence of Christian missions in Africa following independence, as they would be associated with the colonial system. In response, the Church adopted a new strategy of accelerating the Africanization of the clergy. By that time, the number of Congolese mission personnel had reached 20,000 in 1935 (catechists, seminary students, priests, and religious) and 35,000 in 1957, including 16,000 for the Protestant Missions. The process of the creation of an African clergy accounted, for 1954, 349 African priests, and, by 1959, more than 600. However, the first Congolese priest assumed office already in 1917 at Baudoinville, at the seminary of the White Fathers. He was joined by few in the years that followed, as the real flow occurred after the war, reaching, in the 1960s, more than a third of the total number of African priests on the entire continent (Young 2015, 199).

Parallelly, the protestant mission contributed to the creation of more than 500 African pastors. The Africanization of the clergy created the conditions for access to positions of responsibility for the natives, perhaps partly to distance them from the nationalist movements and to fill the frustrations arising from a centralized Belgian system (Lemarchand 2023, 126-133).

As a matter of fact, around the 1960s, a few scattered voices had already risen to claim the full maturity of the African Churches, stating that it implied not only an 'adaptation' of Christianity to African religious maturity and beliefs, but also the promotion of priestly vocations and a certain self-management. Actually, the bloody events that surrounded the African Independences with a anti-colonialist and anti-Christian connotation made the Africanism of the cadres within the Church appear urgent. However, the establishment of a local hierarchy within the African Churches in the 1960s did not change the situation of financial dependence of the Churches of Africa with their take-over by the indigenous hierarchy, on the contrary, it worsened. There has been a gradual deterioration of the socio-economic situation of most African countries that have been victims of both internal mismanagement and the neo-colonial macroeconomic context (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 196). However, consistent with this quasi-progressive attitude, in June 1956, the Bishops of Congo issued an important declaration[71] in which they expressed support for Congolese 'emancipation' (Young 2015, 149-150).

This declaration was published in support of the *Manifeste de la Conscience Africaine* (Manifesto of African Consciousness), released in the same year and promulgated by a group of young Congolese intellectuals to express the urgency of preparing the Congolese population for self-government (Kachama-Nkoy 1961, 300). This document addressed, although quite cautiously, the issue of future political relations between Belgium and the Congo (Vanthemsche 2012, 86).

It is evident that the period of greatest tensions between church and state materialized in the years of the *Lutte Scolaire*. Despite the considerable hostilities between the two institutions, which appeared to have reached a climax, in 1956 there was a certain easing of the conflict between the missionary Church and the state. This may have been due to the Church's desire to gain proximity to the masses and indigenous elites, and the Belgian state administration, which remained uncertain about the political emancipation of the Congolese. The clergy quietly engaged with the streams of change, with the intention of preserving the future of the Church. However, both institutions were

[71] The declaration was reported in a newspaper: The Catholic Advocate, Volume 5, Number 30, 28 July 1956. The article stated as follows: "*The Bishops of the Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi stated at a recent conference here that all inhabitants of Belgium's African territories have the right and duty of taking an active part in political life. They stressed the obligation of Catholics to unite to study social problems and to become leaders of their countrymen. The Bishops made public a declaration giving the position of the Church on private property, labor and salaries, human relations, political emancipation, trade unions, and other social and economic organizations. They stated that any discrimination in wages because of race would be an injustice. The Bishops did not mention the controversial school question. In Brussels, however, a priest charged that there is widespread discrimination in Belgian Congo schools. Rev. S. Dhanis, S.J., a leading Belgian mission school official, said the secular schools are promoted in every way even though they cost more and are requested less by the natives who prefer to attend mission schools*."

now more aware of the divergence of their respective interests. Africanization designated the Church's new relationship with the Congolese world and, as such, its new spirituality.

2.2.4. *Between Fragility and Resilience of the Church through Independence*

Independence came to the Congo in 1960, and, as narrated in the first chapter, there was virtually nothing prepared. The previous co-existence of Church and State in colonial Congo was challenged by the turbulence of the early post-colonial period. Patrice Lumumba, who was born in Katako-Kombe near Tshumbe, took a hostile stance towards the missionary churches. During his few months as Congo's first Prime Minister in 1960, Lumumba introduced new laws on religious freedoms and declared a formal separation of church and state in education. Catholic leaders, for their part, condemned Lumumba as an anticlerical atheist and communist. They remained silent after Lumumba's kidnapping, torture, and murder in 1961 (Carney 2014, 100-101). Obviously, Lumumba's stance that the church should not wield significant influence over public life, coupled with his ambivalent stance towards the Communist bloc, had resulted in the Catholic Church's opposition to him. It is noteworthy that two of the most widely read newspapers in Leopoldville, namely *Courrier d'Afrique* and *Presence Africaine*, were under the direct control of the Catholic Church. These newspapers consistently denounced Lumumba's government for its perceived failure to resolve the prevailing crisis (Gondola 2002, 124).

Until 1960, the missionaries had a monopoly on the organization and management of schools, and after independence, they continued to play this role, but with the integration of Catholic teaching into the national education system. This led to the standardization of curricula and the grouping of schools into Catholic, Protestant, and state education networks. A single curriculum was also introduced for secondary schools (1961) and primary schools (1963) (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 174). Therefore, it is possible to say that from independence to the death of Prime Minister Lumumba, the Church of Congo still fairly enjoyed administrative, financial, and theological autonomy. Moreover, as we have seen, if the Belgian colonial authority abandoned the Congo in total disorder, the Church instead, having trained its indigenous ecclesiastical personnel, was able to maintain its position of influence in the country. Nonetheless, at the onset of the riots that culminated in Lumumba's assassination and persisted subsequently, the Protestant missionaries of the Belgian contingents hastily departed. In contrast, the Catholic missionaries opted to remain in the territory, despite the perils and threats faced. (Oyatambwe 1997, 30).

It is essential to acknowledge that, following the *lutte scolaire* with Buisseret, the Church was experiencing a period of introspection, initially disconcerted by the radical changes that were occurring in the relationship between state and missions. Moreover, the aforementioned 1956 bishops' Declaration was an important historic crucial point, since it recognized the right of the Congolese to self-determine their political trajectory, clashing, for the first time, with the Belgian government's official stand. The marked difference between Church-state relations had even caused a division among the Catholic missionaries, with many progressives asserting their position.
The almost defiant attitude towards the colonial state had then been almost legitimized by the church hierarchy, which, following the introduction of secular schools, openly reacted within the Permanent Committee of Catholic Bishops meeting in 1955 (Markowitz 1970, 242-243). According to Markowitz (1970, 245), Catholics played a greater role, compared to Protestants, in the movement toward independence. They turned out to be more politically and nationalistically minded, and this can be seen by simply observing that the number of Catholic *évulués* was much greater than that of Protestants.

However, this sudden change of course did not convince the entire population. Especially not those who did not believe in the Church's civilizing mission but rather saw it as a colonialist role (Lemarchand 2023, 131). In fact, even if the clergy supported Congolese nationalism with their support for the African Consciousness manifesto, this position as a positive observer of the social impact of nationalism and the Africanization of the liturgy was no longer enough to establish trust and cooperation with the new leaders. Since the Catholic Church in the Congo had been a national enterprise until independence, the Congolese all too often saw little difference between the missionaries and the colonizers.
This situation was one of the major sources of tension that erupted at the time of independence. It was necessary to completely dismantle the paternalism that had characterized them. Indeed, the anti-clerical sentiment that marked those years of unrest was often blamed on the danger of neo-colonialism, and the Catholic Church was accused of being a collaborator or even an agent of it. This situation was one of the major sources of tension that erupted at the time of independence. The church, therefore, had to give up the monopoly and privileges it had previously enjoyed (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 78-79). It was in this context of insecurity and uncertainty about the future of the country that the 37 bishops of the Congo met in Leopoldville from 20 November to 2 December 1961, to discuss the apostolic work accomplished and to take into account the socio-political circumstances of the time, in order to establish future prospects for the spiritual renewal of the people of God in the Congo. From the Act that followed the meeting, there was a reassessment of the role of the secularists

in the Church's evangelizing mission and also of Congolese traditions and languages in liturgical celebrations. For the bishops, this renewal was the best way to prepare the Catholic Church of Congo to enter the post-colonial era and contribute to the birth of a new stable, and modern nation. (Makiobo 2004, 56-59).

The socio-political landscape of independence was shattered and fragile. Despite the overall positive figures, the picture remained internally fragmented, even with regard to the educational power of the Church. In fact, although Congo had the highest level of primary education in Africa, it lacked a real elite. At independence, Congo had only fifteen university graduates, few civil servants, and no army officers. Regarding the Congolese Catholic hierarchy, it initially lacked the capital, cultural, and economic resources to begin a real process of self-financing. (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 245). Moreover, the recently established political parties were characterized by their recent formation, inexperience, and predominantly tribal characteristics. These elements all contributed to the sequence of predictable conjunctions and events that resulted in chaos, which began with the assassination of Lumumba in 1961, and was followed by the intervention of UN forces, the secession of Katanga, and the several subsequent years of war. Broadly speaking, the central government in Leopoldville was severely weakened by a number of secessionist movements, the best known of which was the Katanga movement, led by Moïse Tshombé.

In the meanwhile, in the first months of Lumumba's very short government, he experienced the crisis of the army mutiny, which made him even suspect a conspiracy by the University of Lovanium and threatened to nationalize it. In any case, this Force Publique crisis isolated the Church, which remained one of the few institutions still dominated by foreign personnel in the face of the subsequent forced Africanization of the army. Consequently, in addition to the slow but steady Africanization of the episcopate, this episode made it realize that it had to accelerate the process at all levels of personnel and structures throughout the Congolese Church (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 79-83). Indeed, at the time of independence, expatriate missionaries still played a dominant role in the churches. In 1959, priests from Zaire constituted approximately 10% of all ordained Catholic personnel, and 4 out of 49 bishops were African. On the contrary, by 1975, the Catholic clergy was predominantly comprised of Congolese members, counting up to 39 out of 53 bishops (Young and Turner 2013, 109).

Nonetheless, during the decolonization process, the mission churches retained their framework solidity, albeit in a precarious position in relation to the newly independent African states. Remarkably, the Church demonstrated resilience in the face of the political upheaval of independence,

maintaining its structural integrity (Maxwell 2008, 405-408). According to Young (2015, 580), after the independence, both the Church and the companies survived intact in the Democratic Republic of Congo. At that time, the country was served by twenty-two diocesan missionary societies and about a hundred other religious institutions, mostly Belgian (Gombaniro Rutashigwa 2018, 201-202). Its widespread presence across the territory is therefore indisputable. And even if It is generally accurate to assert that the Church adopted an ambiguous stance at the time of independence, its fundamental role as a bastion of stability helped to keep the educational systems intact. Although the majority of the church hierarchy was white, the missionaries, through their education system, provided the only means of social mobility for the Congolese (Prunier 2001, 141).

Within a few years of independence, the Church was definitively deprived of its dominance in the education sector, making it essential to examine this significant historical juncture. On 12 August 1965, the National Assembly passed Law No. 32/65 on the total nationalization of the education system, which laid down the general principles of education in the Republic of the Congo. Under this law, all private educational institutions became state property, with the exception of schools for the training of religious personnel, which could only provide religious instruction outside the regulated educational institutions and hours.

The *rationale* was to promote a collective identity, to think about development on the basis of a sense of belonging to a community of national culture, and to counteract the centrifugal forces generated by ethnic, linguistic, and cultural heterogeneity. The school was given this role. On the other hand, it seemed necessary to address regional disparities and geographical imbalances in the demand for schooling (Raoul 2020, 444-445). Nevertheless, this decision was the result of a reciprocal exchange of interests. Although the state would have exercised nominal control over all schools and the curriculum as part of national education, the Church, in return, would have retained the benefits it cared most about, namely state funding for operations and control over school personnel (Boyle 1992, 54-55).

2.3. *Mobutu Sese Seko: from African Caudillo to Fallen Angel*

Having played a key role in the murder of his mentor Lumumba, Joseph Mobutu, took full control of the Congo state in a military coup in November 1965, backed by the United States and Belgium. Despite Mobutu's seizure of power, the early relationship between Mobutu and the Catholic hierarchy was not excessively tense. Rather, Mobutu and Catholic leaders such as Kinshasa's Archbishop (later

Cardinal) Joseph Malula shared a nationalist goal of moving beyond the colonial trajectory that had ruled both church and state in the Congo. Mobutu reversed Lumumba's initiative to secularize education, and by 1968 Catholic schools were once again educating nearly two-thirds of Congolese primary school pupils and over 40 percent of secondary school students (Carney 2014, 101). However, this relationship did not last long. In the late 1960s, Mobutu started to perceive the Church as a threat to his growing power and authoritarian ambitions.

Considering the power of the Church, as soon as the regime sought to establish an authoritarian rule, conflict with the missions became inevitable, clashing with the personality and individual choices of an increasingly dictatorial president. The well-known appeal to authenticity was used as a lever by the creators of Mobutism to co-opt the Congolese people, by seduction or force, and to offer them a new society and identity, which quickly became the foundation of a totalitarian regime centered on the figure of the dictator. In the eyes of Mobutu, however, this process had to be accompanied by a gradual suppression of the prerogatives of the Church (Mukanya Kaninda-Muana 2008, 3).

2.3.1. *A New Regime: Silence Means Consent?*

Throughout this period of struggle between Mobutu and the Churches, one could have hoped for an unconditional solidarity of the different Churches, at least the Christian ones, to ward off the emerging dictatorship. But the gravity of the events and the divergence of interests prevented the deployment of some solidarity. Moreover, even considering their diverging interests and reactions, the Protestant and Kimbanguist Churches, seemed to enjoy this atmosphere and took advantage of it to win certain favors from political power (Oyatambwe 1997, 44-45).

During the first decade of the Second Republic, Mobutu maintained a certain level of popularity, with his regime successfully suppressing domestic opposition and undermining exiled politicians who attempted to criticize it from abroad. Numerous organizations aligned themselves with the regime to gain access to its resources, a dynamic also undertaken by the Kimbanguist movement, which, as explored before initially opposed the colonial state and professed secretly for several decades[72]. At the turn of independence, the Kimbanguist Church changed its name to *Eglise de Jesus-Christ sur Terre par le Prophete Simon Kimbangu* (The Church of Jesus Christ on Earth

[72] In 1959, however, the Belgian colonial administration formally recognized Kimbanguism, granting it a status on par with the Catholic and Protestant churches. At this time, the leadership of the church was held by Joseph Diangienda, the second son of Kimbangu.

through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu – EJCSK). Concurrently with the regime change, EJCSK began to demonstrate strong support for the government of Mobutu, contrary to the apoliticism of Protestants and the juxtaposition of the Catholics, which in return offered the church both financial protection and political support (Gondola 2002, 146-148).

The religious movement openly supported Mobutu's regime, even asking its adherents to "*embrace the philosophy of authenticity, to submit to the continuous education of the party, and to always stand behind the Guide (Mobutu) for the triumph of the national revolution*" (Makiobo 2004, 97-98). Consequently, Mobutu not only granted the Kimbanguist Church the status of the third national church, but also provided substantial state subsidies to the community's charitable activities. It was only in the 1990s that the Kimbanguist Church began to withdraw its support from Mobutu.

On the other hand, the Protestant church reacted to the new regime a more neutral approach, in contrast to the Catholic Church. Clearly, their power over the territory was not even comparable to the one of the Catholics in terms of wealth, infrastructure, and organization. Despite their tacit agreement with the regime, Mobutu's repressive measures did not make an exception for them, and they did not oppose them as the Catholics did. Moreover, being Protestants more fragmented among several churches and groups (Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc), the regime, in 1971, united them into one organization, called the *Eglise du Christ au Zaire* (Church of Christ of Congo) (ECZ). This amalgamation of groups under one umbrella, carried out with the help of state complicity, meant that the Protestant Church lost its real voice in criticizing the state. Not all representatives of the protestant church agreed with this decision. Therefore, in February 1971, the leaders of the churches that did not agree with the forced union met in Kinshasa. They decided to establish a new group named *Conseil des Eglises Protestantes au Congo* (Council of Protestant Churches in the Congo) (CEPCO). However, CEPCO, which became CEPZA when the Congo was renamed Zaire in 1972, was subsequently banned by a decree which obliged all Protestants to join the ECZ, making it the only legal Protestant church in the country (Garrard 2013, 134-135).

In 1972, a document was published by the ECZ, where the members of the executive committee gave their support to Mobutu. By extending unconditional support to General Mobutu, the Protestant Church became an instrumental partner for the regime in the endeavors to establish and cultivate the cult of Mobutu as a national hero (Makiobo 2004, 95-97). Clearly, the decision to unify the Protestant church was instrumental in Mobutu's retention of authority, since he regarded religious pluralism as a threat to his control over the population.

The Catholic Church, which had endured significant adversity during the civil unrest that followed the Congo's attainment of independence in 1960, found itself in a position where it could not in any way oppose the newly elected leader of the nation, whose foremost objective was the reconstruction of a robust and stable state. Consequently, the Catholic bishops of Congo publicly endorsed President Mobutu on behalf of the Catholic community as a whole (Makiobo 2004, 83). According to Boyle (1992, 51), the initial attitude of the Catholic Church towards the newborn independent state was primarily self-protective. As previously observed, the post-colonial upheavals marked a period of great uncertainty for the Church. Therefore, they were anxious to move beyond the hostilities that had characterized church-state relations at the end of the colonial period and to establish a working relationship with the new civil authorities, welcoming Mobutu's initial promises of stability (Boyle 1992, 52).

According to Oyatambwe (1997, 76-77), the period of enforced silence by the Church, which coincided with the consolidation of dictatorial rule and the escalation of societal distress, can be attributed to a degree of reasons. Firstly, the Church had become pervaded by the vices of secular life, including corruption, nepotism, and tribalism. Secondly, the Church hierarchy had lost its capacity to wield significant moral influence over politics. Consequently, it relinquished its moral authority over politics, opting instead to benefit from the potential rewards, notably the material advantages, offered in exchange for its acquiescence to the various unethical actions and violent acts of the regime. An example of the passive rhetoric of the Catholic church can be observed in the figure of Cardinal Malula. Despite his initial stances, he later proved to be a significant figure in Congo's history[73]. He became an outspoken critic of the regime, as its policies started to become repressive (Makiobo 2004, 85). Nevertheless, the homily he celebrated in 1965, during a mass in Leopoldville, to mark the end of the work of the Second Vatican Council, stated: "'*It is God who distributes authority. Mr President, the Church recognises your authority, because authority comes from God. We will faithfully apply the laws you wish to establish. You can count on us in your work to restore the peace to which all so ardently aspire...*"[74].

[73] The most significant phases of his religious work were his contribution and commitment to the Africanization of the church. He was committed to the integration of African cultural values into Christianity, and the Christianization of all African political, social, and economic life. However, most importantly, he was one of the advisers to the group that drew up the Manifesto of African Consciousness in 1956, being a strong supporter of independence.

[74] Le Courrier d'Afrique du 26 Novembre 1965. Translated from French and reported by Makiobo, Clément. 2004. *Eglise Catholique et Mutations Socio-Politiques Au Congo-Zaïre*. Editions L'Harmattan, 83.

2.3.2. *The Beginning of the End: Initial Steps Toward Power Centralization*

Without opposition from the ECZ or the Protestant Church as a whole, the state managed to implement many of its repressive policies easily (Garrard 2013, 138). In the period spanning the coup d'état of 1965, to the initiation of the Authenticity Project in 1973, Mobutu implemented two key reforms. These reforms foreshadowed the subsequent adoption of policies involving the suppression of religious autonomy and the curtailment of organizational freedom. These two reforms are, in my opinion, fundamental to the regime's strategic outlook. The reason for this is that the school system constituted a broad sphere of influence for the Church, which was ultimately not desired by the State, particularly in the aftermath of the riots that had occurred in university circles. Secondly, the formal recognition of only three religious entities enabled Mobutu, to a certain extent, to counter messianic movements, which in the past had been instrumental in the rebellion against established power.

The period from 1968 onward is notable for the emergence of a critique of the regime, initiated by several Church officials who publicly denounced the perceived injustices, corruption, and materialism of the Mobutu government. In 1969, the catholic Church articulated concerns regarding the authoritarian and centralizing tendencies of the regime, particularly the expanding influence of the MPR. This was followed, in direct retaliation, by the nationalization of the Church University in Kinshasa and the Protestant University in Kisangani in 1971. These institutions were subsequently amalgamated with a private university in Lubumbashi, which formed UNAZA, a new state university comprising three campuses. Notably, the theology faculties at these institutions were subsequently eliminated (Callaghy 1984, 304). The significant and severe decision of the nationalization of universities came three years after the famous demonstrations in Kinshasa by mainly Lovanium students, which was then brutally repressed and counted several dozen deaths (Young and Turner 2013, 198). With the nationalization of the Lovanium University, in 1971, the church-state relationship became to be characterized by a profound ambiguity. Tensions with the State escalated and then became pervasive due to the perception by Church leaders that the regime was exerting excessive control over the operations of their institutions[75].

The regime began to raise claims.

It intimated that chapters of the *Jeuness du Mouvement Populaire de la Revolution* (JMPR) would be established in every Catholic school and seminary. The negotiations concerning the appointment of

[75] Furthermore, missions' initiatives were reportedly disregarded by party officials and labelled as neo-colonial.

personnel and the financing of primary and secondary schools reached an impasse. Moreover, regime officials started to express their disapproval of religious seminaries sponsored by the church, accusing them of adopting a critical position toward state policies (Boyle 1992, 59).

In December 1971, a law (Law 71/012) was promulgated which regulated all churches in Zaire. The legislation stipulated that the state would only recognize three specific religious institutions: the Catholic Church, the Church of Christ in Zaire, and the Kimbanguist Church. After this initial legislation, additional religious groupings, including those of Islamic, Greek Orthodox, and Jewish faiths, were also recognized by the state. However, in an effort to control the proliferation of new religious sects and to counter the perceived use of these groups as a cover for political opposition to the new regime, all other religious groups were abolished (Callaghy 1984, 176).
From this abolishment of all religious sects within the nation, the EJCSK was among the organizations that benefited from this repression, since dissident religious groups were compelled to either disband or assimilate into the EJCSK. Thanks to all the benefits it gained, the EJCSK became the third-largest organized religious community in Zaire. Moreover, it evolved into a formidable financial institution, owning hundreds of schools and temples throughout the nation (Gondola 2002, 148).

2.3.3. *Authenticity versus Faith*

The decree issued on January 5, 1972, clearly represents the essence of Mobutu's authenticity project, namely the requirement for all the Zairians to drop their Christian names and adopt authentic African names. Mobutu himself gave the example, changing his own name from Joseph-Desire Mobutu to Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu wa za Banga. The meaning of the new name was permeated with divine reference, starting with *Sese Seko* which, in Lingala, meant 'forever lasting' (Adelman 1975, 107). This appeal to authenticity was perceived by the Church as a threat to the Christian faith and therefore denounced It as an 'anachronical concept'. Among the courageous cardinals who openly criticized this program, there was Malula, Zaire's most prominent cleric, who initially refused to comply (Callaghy 1984, 304-305). Malula's confrontation with the regime regarding the establishment of a national ideology was, however, met with limited ecclesiastical support (Boyle 1992,60).
Despite threats and intimidation, Cardinal Malula never ceased to express his criticism of the totalitarian nature of the MPR's ideology (Makiobo 2004, 87-88). However, this strong stance of open

confrontation came to an end as the regime became more oppressive and Malula was exiled[76]. First, all religious broadcasts and programs were targeted in Mobutu's effort to suppress all dissent, and all church-sponsored youth movements, such as the scouts, were dissolved (Young and Turner 2013, 68). In early 1973, he banned even confessional newspapers. It even went as far as, during this particularly turbulent period in the relationship with the Catholic Church, the MPR's Bureau Politique promulgated a statement asserting that under no circumstances would any Zairian institutional authority be permitted to participate in a sacrament ceremony, irrespective of its religious affiliation, in its capacity as an authority (Makiobo 2004, 92).

With these measures, the state power intended to reduce the autonomy of the Catholic Church and subject it to state control, so that it would cease to be a competing authority, an opposition to Mobutu's political action. However, this period of open hostility turned into an opportunity for the church to re-evaluate its figure. Indeed, if it was initially regarded as an institution supporting the powerful colonial power, its image changed after the regime's attacks, and it gradually emerged as the 'voice of the voiceless' (Prunier 2001, 142).

The Authenticity Project took on a new impetus in 1974 when the new official doctrine of the state became Mobutism, and this decision was accompanied by a new Constitution and the creation of a party school, namely the Makanda Kabobi Institute. In order to achieve the highest level of sacredness, the nationhood itself had to become the actual religion. Accordingly, Mobutu made nationality a religion, the MPR the Church, and its founder the Messiah.

However, signs of this radicalization were also evident in the years before.

Already in 1972, a statement by the state radio broadcaster asserted that "the party and not religion should inspire the people" and that the citizens of the country were to place their trust in the MPR rather than in the Catholic Church (Callaghy 1984, 304-305). In the following years, an intensification of the employment of religious rhetoric became manifest in the MPR's documentation, symbolism, and media content[77] (Callaghy 1984, 173). Then, all Church-sponsored youth movements were disbanded, leaving the Church without one of its most powerful and influential elements. Finally, in January 1975, religious instruction in primary and secondary schools was suppressed and substituted

[76] In an interview in the Washington Post, on July 4, 1976, Mobutu declared, regarding Cardinal Malula, that he does not have to negotiate with the cardinal, since "*The church is just a pressure group. The cardinal has under- stood his place in society. I represent the people, not him. After all, he is only a cardinal named by outsiders*." Callaghy, Thomas M. 1984. *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press, 304.

[77] Mentioning Callaghy:"*Using both sacred and secular ideas, the Zairian political religion merges traditional African notions of kingly or chiefly power and of the state with concepts from Christianity and Roman law, both imposed by the colonial state, to depict Mobutu as an instrument chosen by God and the ancestors to bring peace, unity, dignity, and prosperity to Zaire*." Callaghy, Thomas M. 1984. *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Columbia University Press, 319.

with civic education, together with the nationalization of the school system (MacGaffey 1982, 248). Furthermore, Mobutu proceeded to remove Christmas from the official state calendar and mandated the removal of all crucifixes from public institutions, which were subsequently replaced by photographs of Mobutu himself (O'Ballance 1999, 108).

The Church's response was evidently not of condescension, instead, it was accompanied by the dissemination of critical statements regarding the aforementioned measures. Mobutu made it unequivocally clear that any acts deemed subversive would not go unpunished, and that such actions would result in the arrest and closure of the Churches (Callaghy 1984, 306).

Following the Church's overtly confrontational stance against Mobutu's 'internal colonialism'[78], the government convened with a delegation of Catholic bishops to address their complaints. Consequently, in February 1977, Catholic, Protestant, and Kimbanguist churches formally re-assumed responsibility for managing mission schools (Gondola 2002, 143-149). This decision may have been taken by the government because it had demonstrated of not being able to manage it, resulting in an additional ground for accusations of corruption and mismanagement[79] (MacGaffey 1982,248). This combination of factors forced the state to recognize the failure of the policy of nationalization of schools and to hand over their management to the various religious organizations that had previously been responsible for them. Under the 1977 Convention, the schools remained the property of the State, which retained "organizational power". This means that it employed the staff and was responsible for finances, facilities, programs, inspection, and planning. The great innovation of this agreement was the acceptance on both sides of a broad openness to the spiritual values of the Christian religion (Ngomo-Okitembo 1998, 265-267). Indeed, the Church regained its autonomy of the basic educational project, as well as the reintroduction of religious instruction in schools, the authority to hire and manage staff, school personnel, and internal regulations.

This shift in the state's attitude may be due to the decline of Mobutu's popularity at the beginning of 1975, when, after the disastrous politics of nationalization of the enterprises (the Zairianization moves of 1973-1975), the society started to question his commitment to public welfare (Callaghy 1984, 193).

[78] The term was used by a respected Catholic cardinal, Monsignor Bakole wa Ilunga, who condemned what he described as an "internal colonialism" imposed by the greed of Mobutu's cohort on the "margins of the society". The Archbishop of Lubumbashi, Eugene Kabanga, also wrote a pastoral letter denouncing the regime and its manipulation of authenticity to conceal the failures of his economy's policies.

[79] In 1980, Mobutu was compelled to replace the majority of the high officials at the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education following allegations of systematic embezzlement of funds intended for teachers' salaries. Therefore, the government ceded direct control of these funds to the churches. Concurrently, a commission was established to propose fundamental reforms to the National University, which was on the verge of collapse.

As a result, he sought reconciliation with the Church even by rehabilitating Cardinal Malula, and improving relations with the Vatican. Various efforts were made to arrive at a peaceful coexistence, which, obviously, would always be fraught with tension. Nevertheless, Mobutu began to decry the importance of dialogue rather than debate in dealing with the church, encouraging his prefects to adopt new approaches (Callaghy 1984, 306-307).

2.3.4. *As the Regime Loses Favor, the Church Recovers its Voice*

From the mid-1970s through much of the 1980s, the Mobutu regime was actually able to fracture the Catholic hierarchy, which never became a unified voice of opposition. Despite sporadic expressions of opposition, usually formulated as pastoral letters denouncing corruption, there was no open confrontation between the two entities. Apart from the achievements of his co-optation or silencing methods, the regime almost encouraged a culture of self-censorship. Clearly, there were some exceptions, among which figured Cardinal Malula. However, only after the death of Malula in 1989 and significant shifts in international politics, did higher Catholic clergy again take the risk of direct public confrontation with the Mobutu regime (Boyle 1992, 61). Surprisingly, a harsh rhetoric emerged from the ECZ, which, on the occasion of the centenary of Protestantism (1878-1978), launched strong accusations, albeit mainly self-criticism. They blamed themselves for passively accepting the unification of 1970, which was a political decision and not a religious one. Then they denounced Mobutu's progressive personalization of power and his political messianism, which they described as ‘ideological totalitarianism’ (Oyatambwe 1997, 57).

The country faced significant challenges throughout the 1970s, with its situation steadily deteriorating. In 1978, the financial situation of the country was not being recovered through the new austerity strategies, on the contrary, despite the rise in copper prices, the debt was swelling, the currency was devaluing, and wages were falling. Armed liberation movements and politico-religious sects were proliferating. As in previous years, Mobutu sought the Church's graces again, decreeing a partial amnesty to recover imprisoned or exiled opponents and reintroducing the Christmas holiday (Oyatambwe 1997, 58-59). Following the relative stability of the 1980s, the 1990s witnessed a period of significant political and religious turbulence in the Congo. This was characterized by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a ‘second wave’ of African democratization in neighboring nations. Consequently, Mobutu faced mounting pressure from donor countries and active civil society groups to liberalize Zaire's one-party autocracy (Carney 2014, 103).

Contrasts with the State started again at the end of the 1970s, with the publication, in 1978, by the Episcopate of '*le mal zairois'*, a concrete denounce of corruption and the evils of dictatorship, which accused the regime of being the main cause of the country's economic collapse. It should be noted, moreover, that the accusations encompassed a wide range of issues, including injustices of various forms, public immorality, scarcity of essential goods and pharmaceutical products, the rise of youth delinquency, and a resurgence of violence (Makiobo 2004, 110-11). On the other hand, some statements almost seemed to be in line with the philosophy of the regime, including the accusation against foreign powers of seeking to control the nation under the guise of fighting communism (Oyatambwe 1997, 55-56).

However, this matter was promptly forgotten thanks to a moment of relief during the Pope's visit[80], who arrived in Kinshasa in May 1980 and was greeted by a triumphant mass of an estimated one million faithful. Nevertheless, in the year that followed the first visit, relations between the Church and the State were again strained, with the former once again denouncing the misery of the people due to the plundering of the State. Even looting, torture, and arbitrary arrests were mentioned. Mobutu reacted openly in a speech in which he threatened the Church not to interfere in state affairs and that party members would attend sermons to ensure they did not become political platforms and to identify the subversives. The second visit of the Pope, in August 1985, did not improve the situation and, despite the enthusiasm and joy of the people, the time that followed was marked by a darkening of the horizons of hope (Oyatambwe 1997, 59-62)

At the beginning of 1990, the National Bishops' Conference published its historic *Memorandum des Eveques du Zaire*, in which it denounced the system accusing it of benefitting just the interests of privates' properties, exercising a totalitarian power. It is interesting to note that, in an analogous manner to President Mobutu's earlier attempts to subvert the Church by associating it with foreign entities, the Church itself became a vehicle for undermining the dictatorial regime, accusing the regime of complicity in serving foreign economic interests and international financial institutions, whilst neglecting the welfare of the Congolese population (Prunier 2001, 143). In light of mounting public discontent, President Mobutu declared on 14 January 1990 that he would hold public consultations to ascertain the will of the population with respect to the general organization of the country's institutions. The so-called democratization process was proclaimed in April 1990. These

[80] The Pope's speech was along general lines, expressing his desire for Africa to regain its true independence, the need for the Africanization of the clergy, and the fight against corruption.

consultations were a great success and highlighted the aspirations of the population for a radical change in Zaire's situation (Makiobo 2004, 127).

At the beginning of the democratization process, the Church stopped being perceived as a threat to the state. By this time, Mobutu's grip on the nation appeared to have loosened and the political apparatus, including the workings of the secret police (SNIP), had become indifferent to the disputes within the religious circles, more concerned with what was happening between the actors in the political sphere (Garrard 2013, 137). At the beginning of August 1991, an atmosphere of hope mixed with apprehension reigned throughout the country In this political climate, the Sovereign National Conference was established, which, as in other countries in Africa, functioned as a democratic forum of all relevant social forces in a nation, with the aim of evaluating past failings and establishing a new future course[81] (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 191). Despite the conspicuous absence of President Mobutu, the CNS did indeed open on 7 August at the Palais du Peuple in Kinshasa. Unfortunately, this national forum, whose aim was to chart the transition toward a new political order, was unable to begin the constructive work for which it had been convened, due to the desperate resistance of the diehard supporters of the old political order (Makiobo 2004, 134). In an effort to impede the progression of the Zairean nation, certain proponents of authority sought to forestall the implementation of this institution and finally accomplished to stop it. The resumption of work by the CNS was demanded by priests in Kinshasa, who later organized a March of Hope (‘*pour la paix et l'espoir’*) on 16 February 1992. In contrast to other cities in the country, where there were few incidents, this peaceful march was brutally suppressed by the army in Kinshasa. The repression resulted in several deaths and injuries, and numerous arrests were made, especially among young priests and European missionaries. The provisional death toll was 27, with eight unidentified (Makiobo 2004, 208-209). Tragically, the re-opening of the CNS, which reconvened in April, came at the cost of human lives (Boyle 1992, 49-50). However, before the promised elections could happen, war broke out in Congo.

[81] The task of the CNS was to examine the history of the country to identify how and why things had not turned out as hoped for at independence and to provide a pathway out of the multidimensional crisis - political, economic, social, cultural and moral - facing the country. This was intended to lead to building the political institutions necessary to guide the transition to multiparty democracy.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this chapter suggests that the relationship between the state and the church has been a fundamental aspect of Congolese history. The formation of the Congo Free State established the foundational principles of interdependence, which were solidified during the period of the Belgian Congo. However, this dynamic relationship was not without its moments of contention and uncertainty. The Church's reliance on state subsidies and protection engendered numerous advantages, encompassing both material and social benefits. However, this dynamic also entailed certain disadvantages, particularly with regard to its association with the colonial legacy in the perception of the Congolese populace. Consequently, it is noteworthy to observe that, despite the prevailing nationalist sentiments that characterized the years leading up to independence, the Church did not retract its position.

It is thus relevant to refer to the remarks of Boyle (1992, 56), who outlines some interesting arguments as to why, despite the period of severe conflict and uncertainty, the church was able to maintain, if not strengthen, its status. First, the continued presence of expatriate Catholic missionaries after independence, contrary to protestants, ensured external ties and a smooth transition for personnel. Second, retaining the socio-political prestige of a missionary school education, that trained most of Zaire's independence-era leaders, provided the Church with direct access to national leadership. Lastly, post-independence cooperation with the state in education, health, and other endeavors, gradually bonded church and state together, both in public perceptions and actual administrative environments.

Furthermore, the church's positions have historically been characterized by ambiguity during periods of adversity. For instance, while the Catholic church endorsed the Manifesto of African Consciousness, it concurrently employed a strongly paternalistic discourse towards the civilian population. Conversely, the Protestant church, denouncing King Leopold's brutalities, remained comparatively silent during the dictatorial regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. In fact, according to some scholars (Young and Turner 2013, 65-67), in those years the Catholic Church constituted a formidable opponent to the government, having a significant presence in public health and education, and exercising considerable influence in peripheral areas. Nevertheless, the radicalism of the Church's critical stance should not be overestimated.

According to Nzongola-Ntalaja (2013), one has to consider that the institution of the church was too conservative to create a countervailing social movement. Their action was mainly the publication of progressist documents drafted by young priests. On the other hand, the bishops, as individuals,

cultivated cordial and even warm relations with the government. However, criticism of the wrongdoing of the government, the defense of civil liberties, and attacks on injustices and corruption barely existed within the Protestant leadership. The attacks on the Catholic Church during the Mobutism's years were fierce. This was because the Church, with all its cultural, social, and technical implications, embodied a form of authority and even control over the masses, the post-coup Congolese state, torn by factionalism since the day after independence, had virtually no attributes of authority and legitimacy. Consequently, in times of political and economic difficulty, the regime systematically eased tensions with the Church.

Chapter III

The Role of Corporate Enterprises as a Mean of State Control: From Colonial to Postcolonial Congo

Introduction

During the colonial period, a small number of African low-income countries were responsible for the production and export of metals and minerals to European markets, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but also Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda. The majority of these countries' mineral deposits remained undiscovered by foreign capital, particularly in West Africa. However, the establishment of mining sectors in these regions resulted in their disarticulation from pre-existing economies, leading to their operation as economic enclaves. These areas served as conduits for the repatriation of a substantial proportion of profits to mother companies based overseas. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the shareholders of *Société Minière des Grands Lacs* (MGL)[82] (Great Lakes Mining Company), the Belgian mining firm that enjoyed a monopoly on mining production in the eastern part of the country, received an eighteen-fold return on their original investment of 377.4 million Belgian francs between 1924 and 1949 (Radley 2023, 26-27). The example of MGL illustrates how economic activities in the colonies were part of a larger capitalist system, which firstly emerged in Western Europe. This system was further disseminated across the global stage, through imperialist expansion and colonial conquest. Eventually, it resulted in the subordination of the majority of the global South, comprising Asia, Africa, and Latin America, within the emergent global order (Radley 2023, 5).

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is recognized as a country with significant potential for natural resource exploitation, a status that still holds today. The country is endowed with a wide range of minerals, including copper, cobalt, tin, zinc, gold, diamonds, iron ore, silver, cadmium, uranium, and europium. The economic exploitation perpetrated in the Belgian Congo was founded upon the precedent experience of the Free State, which regarded the Congo as a significant contributor

[82] In 1923, the *Société manière des Grands Lacs* (MGL) was formed as a mining subsidiary, property of the Belgian industrialist Baron Empain's *Groupe Empain* (Empain Group) until the 1970s. Following the establishment of the MGL, all the mining operations in the Kivu region were run by subsidiaries of private Belgian corporations, most of which were connected to the Empain family. Radley, Ben. 2023. Disrupted Development in the Congo: *The Fragile Foundations of the African Mining Consensus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46.

to Belgium's capital accumulation (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 28-29). The initial financial and economic penetration was initiated by King Leopold II, yet was substantially continued in the Belgian Congo, as will be discussed in the first part. This will include an analysis of the region's economic trajectory, which is crucial for comprehending the interconnection between colonial decisions and market fluctuations. The subsequent analysis of the largest holding companies and enterprises in the Congo is pivotal in comprehending the strategic link that enabled a distinct degree of control over the colony, which was founded on the relations between these entities and the government. The paragraph culminates with an examination of the working conditions of the Congolese, a necessary step in introducing the discontent that would subsequently give rise to the first protests and demands from the Indigenous towards Belgium.

Indeed, in the second part of the chapter, these factors are discussed in the context of the consequences of colonialism on the structure of labor, the absence of expertise, and the potential correlation between these deficiencies and the education sector. The subsequent section focuses on fundamental regulatory passages, which highlight the significance of the relationship between the state and enterprises at the time of independence. The Belgian state's strategic approach to achieving independence that would align with its interests is elucidated through the implementation of reforms made at the *extremo momento*. A pivotal aspect in comprehending the intricate dynamics of the colonizing state lies in the Katanga secession crisis, a case study that exemplifies the intricate interweaving of economic and political interests.
Finally, in the last part, will briefly observe the attitude of Mobutu's dictatorial regime towards the complex state enterprise system that had been built up during the colonial period. Zaire, like many other countries, decided to reduce external control over property in the post-independence period (Radley 2023, 26-27). In the DRC, this process was triggered by the Belgian law of 1960, which granted Belgian nationality to Congolese colonial companies a few weeks before independence. Mobutu's first response was the Bakajika law of June 1966, which nationalized the UMHK and launched the Zaireanization program.

The present chapter is therefore dedicated to the analysis of the evolution of the connections between enterprises and the colonial and post-colonial state, with particular reference to the impact of decolonization. This analysis is complemented by macroeconomic perspectives, which are essential for comprehending the broader context of colonial and post-colonial policies. The thread that runs through this chapter is the one of the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga*. The chapters examine its birth, development, and (alleged) end. It is an emblematic case study since, in addition to being

one of the most profitable companies in Congo, its links with Belgium and its own exploitative interests led it to play a leading role in one of the most painful episodes of the Congo's independence process, namely the secession of Katanga.

3.1. *The patterns of Colonial exploitation in the Belgian Congo*

The "civilizing mission", outlined in the second Chapter, was presented as a humanitarian endeavor, yet it was driven by economic ambitions that ultimately shaped the relationship between Belgium and the Congo. The employment of the rhetoric of free trade was used to secure international approval. With the handover of the Congo to Belgium Belgium, the economic framework encompassed a shift from an exploitative colonial approach to developmental policies. In this regard, the preexisting framework of enterprises enabled Belgium's colonial exploitation to generate substantial profits from its colony while maintaining minimal costs. Subsequently, despite the persistence of forced labor and substandard working environments, a form of 'industrial paternalism' was cultivated by major corporations during the post-World War II era, thereby partly ameliorating the labor conditions.

3.1.1. *Roots of Colonial Exploitation*

As demonstrated above, the campaign initiated by King Leopold for his personal annexation of the Congo was founded on a series of humanitarian claims, his 'civilizing mission', whilst also asserting that the colony would generate significant revenue for Belgium. This rhetoric persisted for decades, emphasizing its purported benefits. Leopold successfully employed the free trade card to obtain the consent of the other states during the Berlin Conference, asserting that no state would be granted special privileges within the territory. Indeed, the Act of the Berlin Conference explicitly prohibited any form of protectionism. Furthermore, the document stipulated the principle of freedom of navigation and prohibited the imposition of import duties within the conventional Congo basin. In contrast, exports were subject to freely applied taxation (Vanthemsche 2012, 146). However, an examination of the facts reveals a different reality. Actually, the Congo Free State's trade was not as free as it might have been, given that the government and a select group of private concessionaires effectively monopolized the profitable activities (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 21-22). This state of affairs,

while it did indeed save the Congo Free State from bankruptcy, was a flagrant violation of the spirit of the Berlin Act and thus provoked criticisms from both Belgium and other nations. By the 1890s, the colony's finances were in the red, and Leopold sought to lift the ban on import duties imposed by the Berlin Act. At the 1890 Brussels anti-slavery conference, the conference's signatory powers agreed to the proposal, and the initial customs tariff was implemented in 1892 (Maurel 1992, 24). However, any import duty regime needed to be founded on the principle of non-discrimination, which entailed the equitable treatment of all nations and banned favoritism and protectionism (Vanthemsche 2012, 147).

Initially, few countries had expressed interest in colonial enterprise. However, Leopold, keen to prevent a strong foreign hold on his CFS, attempted to garner interest from Belgian business circles. The outcome of these efforts was the establishment of the Belgian private enterprise *Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie* (CCCI) in 1886. The establishment of the CCCI subsequently led to the emergence of a network of 'Congolese' companies within Belgium. Between 1886 and 1896, just thirteen of these ‘Congolese’ companies had been founded, but they were puppet financial constructs operating under Leopold's rule (Vanthemsche 2012, 148-149). However, during the CFS years, Leopold initiated measures to attract foreign capital, primarily as a means to finance major transport and mining enterprises, while concurrently endeavoring to circumscribe their authority (Peemans 1975, 151).

A provision, which, as seen in the previous chapter, was envisaged by Leopold for the evangelizing missions, was to be able to arbitrarily decide to whom to direct land concessions (Maurel 1992, 74). This policy, which was inaugurated by a decree in July 1885, and based on the assumption that unoccupied land belonged to no one and could therefore be claimed as state property, was essentially adopted by the Belgian Congo. Indeed, during the decades of Belgian colonialism, thousands of acres were granted to missionary societies, private enterprises, and settlers (Lemarchand 2023, 117). In the end, the CFS proved to be profitable for Belgium. It is estimated that, between the beginning of the colonial annexation and the end of the CFS in 1908, Belgium spent forty million gold francs on the colony and earned sixty million (Vanthemsche 2012, 160).

The model developed in the Congo is widely applicable to the states of colonial Africa, where a form of colonial extraction was implemented. This program entailed the net transfer of economically valuable resources from Indigenous societies to European societies. Moreover, the term 'colonial exploitation' refers to practices and policies that enabled the extraction of resources without the

provision of appropriate compensation to Indigenous peoples and their natural environment. Such practices encompassed land alienation, forced labor, and forced cultivation, as well as commercial monopolies and excessive taxation (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 2).

3.1.2. *Belgium-Congo Economic Relations: A Political Perspective*

During the Congo Free State rule, ivory accounted for more than half of the colony's exports, until the end of the 1890s, making Belgium at one point the most important ivory trader globally. Later, production shifted to wild rubber harvesting, whose commercial history became sadly infamous for the violence it entailed (Rutz 2018, 12-15). Generally, King Leopold concretely erased free trade from his dominium[83], despite the provisions of the Berlin Conference, establishing a regime that connected state capitalism with private monopolies, and acquiring interests in several concession companies (Gann 2015, 118-124). However, red rubber production became insufficient at some point, giving way to copper mining, which reached its peak of profitability in 1899 (Gann 2015, 144). The other primary products of the colonial economy, until the 1920s, were ivory, cotton, and palm oil. The Belgian government also derived considerable benefits from Congo's mineral industry, which, commencing in the late 1920s, became the foundation of the economic structure of the colony (Young 2015, 15). Following the Congo Free State era, the primary focus of economic development in Congo was the Katanga region, which was abundant in natural resources. The potential for the development of the mining industry in Katanga was contingent upon the construction of railways, which would facilitate the transportation of mineral wealth to ports for subsequent transport to Europe (Gondola 2002, 84-85).

Therefore, in the early 1920s, a major infrastructure project was launched for Congo. The infrastructure development was paid for with a theoretically repayable loan by Belgium, although the loan was never returned. Concurrently, a labor shortage crisis reached its peak in 1926, which led the government to consider extreme measures such as importing Chinese workers and general conscription, which were then rejected. The administration's involvement in the recruitment process

[83] As early as 1891, a decree was issued ordering Free State officials in the Aruwimi and Ubangi-Uele regions to secure ivory and rubber for the state. This was followed by further decrees forbidding Africans to sell to anyone but the state. Furthermore, whoever bought such goods from private individuals was regarded as receiving stolen goods. The institution of a state monopoly on rubber and ivory gave rise to an immediate outcry from trading companies in Belgium and elsewhere, resulting in the severing of relations with the Parliament and several supporters of Leopold's Congo Free State. Ewans, Martin. 2017. *European Atrocity, African Catastrophe : Leopold II, the Congo Free State and Its Aftermath*. London: Routledge, 158.

increased, and the use of force became widespread[84]. Fortunately, despite strong opposition from the private sector, the government imposed rigorous controls on forced recruitment, even if this meant a slight decline in economic growth (Young 2015, 220). Demand for manpower was linked to the growth in transport infrastructure, needed for industrial production, and a more efficient exploitation of the colony's natural reserves. Infrastructure was necessary to facilitate the transport of mining materials to offset the high cost of investment in this sector (Kisangani 2022, 91) (Maurel 1992, 152-153). In fact, the railways were conceived and designed in line with the development of mining and logging. The same was true of river mining, whose units were specially adapted to support the railways (Mpoy Kadima 2019, 132). Investment in infrastructure not only reduced transport costs but also helped to connect economic players and expand the market. The mining sector indirectly subsidized low transport rates for crops and food, since mining companies needed cheap food for their workers so that wages could be kept low. It was precisely the capital invested in transport that reduced the costs of other sectors and also concentrated the greatest industrial growth in Leopoldville and Elizabethville (Kisangani 2022, 104-106).

The rapid development of this significant construction project, and the subsequent economic growth it fostered, suggested that the Belgian government was committed to maximizing the potential of the colony. However, it is noteworthy that this rapid progress would not have been attainable without the substantial private investments that were leveraged (Gondola 2002, 86). Considering this variable, it is relevant to mention that, during the establishment of the Congo Free State, foreign investors slowly became eager to inject capital into the colony. However, Leopold's stance on this matter was equivocal, exhibiting a duality of behavior that oscillated between encouragement and rejection. This ambiguity stemmed from his desire to ensure that Belgium maintained its predominant influence within the colony. This same desire for the preservation of the national character of the colony applied during the period of Belgian rule (Vanthemsche 2012, 165-166).

Generally, from 1920 onwards, the Congo experienced a strong economic expansion, stimulated by changing external conditions. Several interdependent factors contributed to this expansion. On the one hand, the post-war period created a strong demand in the industrialized countries for raw materials, mining, and vegetables, of which the Belgian colony was a potential producer. On the other hand, war, the Russian Revolution, and instability in China diverted Belgian investment from its traditional overseas destinations, making the colony a particularly safe haven. Finally, the

[84] Moreover, some recruiters were private contractors. Their methods of recruitment were often questionable since they bribed village chiefs with European luxury products, such as blankets and bicycles, and a bonus for each worker they supplied. They wisely kept quiet about working conditions in the mines. Van Reybrouck, David. 2014. Congo: The Epic History of a People. New York: Ecco, 166.

convergence of the colonial currency with the Belgian franc after 1919 created particularly favorable conditions for Congolese exports, given the continuous devaluation of the metropolitan currency against the pound and the dollar, in which the prices of raw materials sold on the world market were expressed (Peemans 1998,30).

During the crisis of the 1930s, the Congo's economy and budget were under such pressure that the colony's very existence was under threat. The copper industry in particular, which constituted an essential component of the colonial economy, was severely impacted by the Great Depression[85] (Young 2015, 221). There was a dramatic decrease in production as a result of the falling price of copper, which led to a devaluation of the currency (Gondola 2002, 86). If economic growth reversed during the 1930 crisis, a period of slow growth followed, interrupted by the stagnation of the immediate pre-war period (1938-1940). This was followed by a period of progress during the war (1941-1944), which represented a qualitative leap for the Congolese economy (Huybrechts 2010, 27). In fact, during the Second World War, the Congo provided military and financial assistance to Belgium[86], which was rewarded by being granted financial backing to the *Fonds du Bien-Être indigene* (Fund for Indigenous Well-Being). Nevertheless, Belgium was never particularly generous to its colony, as it was often praised externally. This can partly be attributed to the fact that the state itself did not enjoy such a favorable financial situation. Indeed, the public funds allocated to Congo were predominantly loans that the colonial treasury had contracted to cover its financial requirements. Only at the done of independence, the situation reversed (Vanthemsche 2012, 161-163). In the post-World War II era, the copper, gold, and tin industries experienced significant growth, with increased output during this period being a result of the Belgian Congo's efforts in supporting the Allied forces. The demand for rubber for military equipment, driven by the American and British armies, played a crucial role in this economic expansion (Gondola 2002, 87). This era is characterized as the second industrialization wave, which followed the one that occurred in the years following the Belgian takeover and World War I (1920-40). During this period, the number of workers increased

[85] Between 1929 and 1933, imports fell by almost 70 percent, leading to a nationwide economic downturn characterized by significant job losses, particularly among skilled and semi-skilled workers. The population of Leopoldville dropped from 37,054 in 1929 to 22,184 in 1933. In Katanga, the Depression resulted in a 70 percent reduction in the African workforce compared to 1929 levels.

[86] Following the invasion of Belgium by Germany, during the Second World War, the Union Minière relocated its headquarters to New York City, transferring 1,250 tons of uranium. This uranium remained undiscovered for more than two years before being sold to the Manhattan Project. During the war, Congolese workers undertook a relentless schedule of uranium extraction in a clandestine operation, with the objective of delivering hundreds of tons of uranium to the US on a monthly basis. Koshy, Susan, Lisa Marie Cacho, Jodi A. Byrd, and Brian Jordan Jefferson. 2022. *Colonial Racial Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 272.

dramatically to cope with the wartime increase in production, the rate of production growth was particularly high in the mining sector, and the inflow of private capital increased.

Taking advantage of the moment of economic prosperity, the Ten-Year Plan (1949-1959) was developed[87] (Huybrechts 2010, 20-21)[88], resulting in unprecedented growth rates. It called for huge investments in the country, aiming at the upgrading and development of the transportation infrastructure (Peemans 1980, 265-266). Indeed, between the years 1945 and 1958, the Congolese domestic market underwent a series of policy measures. These included the augmentation of wages, the enhancement of social security systems, such as pensions and child allowances, and the establishment of a minimum wage (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 237-241). One can argue that, after the Second World War, the transformed international environment, together with the Cold War, affected the decolonization movement as well. This event represented a significant shift in the prevailing philosophy of Belgian colonial exploitation. It is evident that, in the aftermath of the war, the official Belgian doctrine of colonialism underwent a paradigm shift during this period, moving from an 'exploitative colonialism' to a more 'developmental colonialism' orientation. This shift was a response to the growing demands of post-war Congolese society for social, political, and economic reforms (Buelens and Marysse 2009, 144).

With regard to foreign trade, the discourse became more complex. Despite the guarantee of free trade, Belgian politicians were eager to safeguard a privileged link with the colony to the greatest extent possible. Finally, the post-war context, ushered in by the 1919 adoption of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Convention, marked a significant shift. This Convention not only reaffirmed the principle of non-discrimination but also granted the colonial powers in the Conventional Congo Basin the prerogative to establish import duty rates (Vanthemsche 2012, 169). The customs policies of Belgium and Congo, when considered in conjunction with the currency parity between the Belgian and the Congolese franc, resulted in the stimulation of exports of Congolese raw materials to Belgium. It is evident that Belgium imported a greater quantity of these materials than was necessary to satisfy its domestic demand (Vanthemsche 2012, 196).

[87] By the end of 1959, total expenditure under the Ten-Year Plan amounted to 43.4 billion francs, of which only 1.1 billion, or 2.5 percent, was spent on African agriculture. Peemans, Jean-Philippe. 1998. *Congo-Zaïre Au Gré Du XXe Siècle: Etat, Économie, Société 1880-1990*. Editions L'Harmattan, 50.

[88] The Ten-Year Plan, which could have changed Congo's economic structures in this direction, has instead strengthened the exporting vocation of the transport networks (favoring the railway networks and sacrificing the road network) and has contributed little to the reintegration of the rural regions, accentuating the marginalization of indigenous agriculture. Huybrechts, André. 2010. *Bilan Économique Du Congo*. Editions L'Harmattan, 22.

Regarding the Congo-Belgium market relations, Belgium prioritized its own national interests over those of the colony, and this was evident in multiple ways. The monetary policy of the Belgian state was primarily designed to protect the value of its national currency. This was achieved by imposing a series of devaluations on the Congolese economy, which had the effect of weakening the value of the Congolese franc. A similar pattern emerged in the context of loans, where the Belgian treasury prioritized its own financial interests over those of the Congolese public finances. The manner in which the Belgian authorities conceptualized and administered their 'privileged relationship' with the Congo, particularly in domains of transport networks and trade management, led to diminished revenues or augmented expenditures for the colony (Vanthemsche 2012, 197).

3.1.3. *The Power of Financial Groups and The Case of the UMHK*

In accordance with the terms of the agreement reached between King Leopold and the Belgian state, the nation acquired a substantial quantity of both real estate and personal property located within Belgium that had previously belonged to the Congo Free State. This included stock valued at nearly 61 million francs in various Congo enterprises that had formerly been owned by the CFS. Consequently, the government obtained a significant stake in Congolese interests. However, the state did not have direct business powers, yet it had a direct take in private profits[89] (Gann 2015, 201). Indeed, more than any other African government, the government of the Congo has been involved in what has been termed the "private sector" of the economy, primarily through direct investment in common and preferred shares, bonds, and loans to business firms. Belgium's investment in business enterprise increased steadily as the economy developed, and, concomitantly, the state's revenue grew in parallel with that of private shareholders (Wolfe 1966, 365-366).

The pivotal function of the mining industry reached its peak from the 1930s onwards, when the Congo constituted the source of more than half the world's diamond production, primarily for industrial use. A plethora of other minerals, including gold, tin, manganese, cobalt, and radium, were also discovered in the region and were subsequently exploited according to the Leopoldian system of joint ventures

[89] In 1937, a significant amendment was made to the 1919 legislation, which had previously granted the state both voting rights and the right to appoint state representatives to the mining companies' boards of directors in which the state held shares. The new mining code was enacted with a decree signed on 24 September, and it declared the state a partner, but not an owner. The decree also stipulated the allocation of 20 percent of shares in all mining corporations, along with a specified percentage of profits, to the colonial state, as a concession of land power based on its holdings in the capital of the mining companies. Kisangani, Emizet François. 2022. *The Belgian Congo as a Developmental State: Revisiting Colonialism*. Routledge, 143.

between public and private interests[90]. Over time, the revenue generated from these holdings accounted for nearly the entirety of the public debt, while the *Union Minière* contributed approximately one-third of the total revenues (Ewans 2017, 237).

These financial conglomerates effectively wielded control over most substantial corporate entities within the colony. The subsequent discourse shall provide an elucidation of their genesis in a sequential and, to the extent possible, exhaustive manner. According to Lemarchand (2023, 114-115), the corporate groups that controlled the economy of the Congo were five. Among these figured the *Baron Empain banking group*, whose main subsidiary was the *Compagnie des Chemins de Fer du Congo Supérieur aux Grands Lacs Africains* (1889) (CFL)[91]. Secondly, he mentioned the *Société Commerciale et Minière* (Cominière), founded in 1810 by the *Nagelmaekers banking group*, which counted among its subsidiaries the *Société Forestière et Agricole du Mayombe* (Agrifor), the *Chemins de Fer Vicinaux du Congo* (Vicicongo), and *the Coloniale de l'Electricité* (Colectric). Then it figured the *Société de Bruxelles pour la Finance et l'industrie* (Brufina), which managed one of the Congo's two major tin producers (Symétain), a prominent cotton firm (Cotoneo), and a real estate enterprise operating on a colony-wide scale (*Crédit Foncier Africain*). Additionally, there was *Huilever*, a Belgian subsidiary of the Anglo-Dutch conglomerate *Unilever*, which exercised control over the Congo's vegetable oil production, processing, and export.

Lastly, and of paramount significance, figured the well-known *Société Générale de Belgique* (SGB), founded in 1822 by William of Holland. It was a holding company with subsidiaries in mining and other activities in the Congo's economy. Through the SGB, in essence, the Belgian administration exercised control over the Congolese economy in its broadest scope. The strategy employed by *Société Générale* to extend its dominance over the economy consisted of the use of specialized holding groups to exert control over the companies under its control (CCCI and *Compagnie du Katanga*), the use of corporations, direct participation in the capital of consolidated companies, and indirect participation in subsidiaries (Ndela Kubokoso 2020, 35). According to a 1934 estimation, the SGB alone held a commanding 5.4 billion, out of the 8.3 billion Belgian francs that had been invested in the Congo (Vanthemsche 2012, 181). Furthermore, it is pertinent to consider not only the economic power of these groups, but also the fact that these colonial trusts were able to exercise considerable

[90] The *Société Générale* held the majority share, but the colony itself also had significant holdings, for example, within Forminière, the State held more than half of the total capital.
[91] The *Compagnie des Chemins de Fer du* Congo supérieur *aux Grands Lacs Africains* (CFL) was founded in 1902 by the Belgian businessman Edouard Empain. Irrespective of the economic situation, the CFL was immediately granted substantial land concessions and a minimum interest rate guaranteed by the Congo Free State.

influence over policy-making organs at all levels. This was facilitated by their membership in both formal consultative institutions and informal channels (Young 2015, 18).

The SGB resulted being the most powerful Belgian financial company, controlling approximately 70 percent of the Congo economy. Its operating subsidiary, namely *the Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie* (CCCI), was one of the most successful instruments for government-oligopoly collaboration (Lemarchand 2023, 116)[92]. In fact, this partnership of interlocking Belgian trusts under the leadership of the SGB and foreign interests created, in 1887, the oldest colonial company, namely *the Compagnie du Congo pour le commerce et l'industrie* (CCCI) (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 30). The establishment of the CCCI, which was strongly supported by the King to attract foreign interest in the colony, subsequently led to the emergence of a network of 'Congolese' companies within Belgium. Between 1886 and 1896, just thirteen of these 'Congolese' companies had been founded, but they were puppet financial entities operating under Leopold's rule (Vanthemsche 2012, 148-149). Finally, the SGB acquired control over the CCCI in 1928. The CCCI was established with the objective of promoting industry, trade, agriculture, finance, and infrastructure. The construction of the Lower Congo railway was identified as a priority initiative. Consequently, a subsidiary company, the *Compagnie du chemin de fer du Congo* (CFC), was established in 1890 with 60 percent of the initial capital provided by Belgian, British, and German private groups, and 40 percent by the Belgian state (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 31). Moreover, in the second post-war period, the United States strengthened its control over strategic minerals, and, indeed, through the Rockefeller Group, it acquired a stake in the CCCI (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 55).

Moreover, it is noteworthy that the giant SGB also managed Congo's only diamond producer, *Forminière*, held a substantial (albeit indirect) stake in *Géomines*, a major tin producer, held interest within the *Compagnie du Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga* (BCK), the *Compagnie Minière du BCK*, the *Compagnie Cotonniere Congolaise* (Cotonco), and many others. Most importantly, it controlled, through the *Comité Spécial du Katanga* (CSK), the Congo's largest operating company, the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga* (UMHK) (Young 2015, 16-17). Therefore, the SGB did exercise ultimate control over the UMHK (Vanthemsche 2012, 149).

[92] It is relevant to mention the Comité Intérieur Colonial (CIC), a committee that oversaw the 'economic empire' of the Société Générale de Belgique, supervising the holding company's multiple participation in individual companies. Established in 1928, following the absorption of *Banque d'Outremer* by SGB, it significantly increased its shares in the colony. Subsequent to independence, the CIC underwent a transformation into the Comité Intérieur Congolais (CIC), a body that reported extensively on the events surrounding the Congo crisis. Only a few years later the CIC was finally re-baptized in the Comité Intérieur Africain (CIA). Declercq, Robrecht. 2023. "Economic Decolonization and Strategies of Belgian Business after Congolese Independence (1960-1978)." *Journal of Belgian History* 53 (3): 74–97.

After the UMHK, the BCK, a private railroad company founded with French-Belgian capital especially, was the second largest and most influential entity in Katanga (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 30). Despite being formally tasked with the construction of a rail connection between Katanga and Bas-Congo, the company also held significant mining rights (Van Reybrouck 2014, 163).

Moreover, the CCCI set up a concessionary company with extraordinary rights and powers to guarantee effective recruitment, administration, and mining exploration in Katanga, namely the *Compagnie du Katanga* (CK) (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 31). The CK was previously established in 1891 and had important concessions in the region (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 219). Therefore, its primary function was to exploit and manage the region's enormous mineral wealth. However, it even enjoyed almost unlimited economic and administrative powers in Katanga (Gann 2015, 143). Essentially, this company owned one-third of the region's territory, while the other two-thirds were held exclusively by the State, which in return received 10 percent of the shares in the new company (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 31). Practical organizational and management difficulties eventually prompted the state and the company to pool their assets and entrust the administration of their joint venture to a new organization, the *Comité spécial du Katanga* (CSK), in 1900. The shares of CSK were divided between CK and CFS, one-third and two-thirds, respectively, making it a "*semi-governmental organization run by the colonial state with public-private funding*" (Van Reybrouck 2014, 162). It was given to the CSK the jurisdiction over some 112 million acres and freehold rights over some 35 million acres and even had its own police force (Lemarchand 2023, 118).

Moving now to the company that was to play an extraordinary role in the exploitation of the colony: the *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga.* The UMHK was successfully established on 18 October 1906, thanks to the resources of the British concessionary company *Tanganyika Concessions*, whose shareholding in the new company until the Great Depression was equivalent to 50 percent. The other half was held by the SGB (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 219). The establishment of the *Union Minière* market resulted in a shift in the policy of the SG, which consequently assumed a more active role in colonial investments. Mining, especially copper, became to be increasingly profitable, attracting foreign capitalists' investments (Gann 2015, 143-144).
In 1911, the Union Minière entirely passed under Belgian control and started to produce copper on a commercial scale, turning Elizabethville into a metropole that started to attract labor migrants (Gann 2015, 145-146). The UMHK was a prominent producer of cobalt and uranium[93], and its production

[93] On the other hand, the other largest concessionaire, *the Comité National du Kivu* (CNK), was established in 1928 and enjoyed freehold rights. It was created to manage and exploit the vacant lands appropriated by the *Compagnie des*

of copper was ranked third globally (Lemarchand 2023, 234). Since its creation, Katanga's mining industry has been the backbone of the Congolese economy. Its copper exports represented a large proportion of total exports, and the government was heavily dependent on copper revenues. Moreover, it was the largest employer in the colony for most of the colonial period (Juif 2019, 322). However, during the 1930s Great Depression, the *Union Minière*'s workforce was reduced by 15,000, and the European population of the Congo experienced a decline of one-third (Young 2015, 221). In terms of labor policies and social welfare, *Union Minière* obtained the most favorable results, clearly at the forefront of Congolese legislation of the time. The company, starting in the 1920s, established a system analogous to that which was in place in Belgium, encompassing family allowances, paid holidays, pensions, and compensation for accidents at work and occupational diseases. Furthermore, the company established social centers and provided substantial subsidies to a wide range of clubs and associations, encompassing sports, cultural, and youth organizations (Ergo 2009, 227).

The control of these five large companies, all Belgian-owned except one, was so heavy that they managed three-fourths of all economic activity. It has been observed that these companies were intimately linked to the state. The scope of its power was not confined to unparalleled economic control, as evidenced by its significant ownership of share capital in major Belgian trusts. Instead, it was also evident in its substantial influence over the boards of fundamental public services, such as transport and electricity. This gave it a more robust position compared to any other African colonial government (Gann 2015, 202).

3.1.4. *Working Conditions: between Forced Labor and Industrial Paternalism*

In 1910, Congo finally opened to free trade. However, it never had a chance. Following the end of the First World War, the system of compulsory cultivation continued to expand, mainly with the aim of broadening and diversifying African peasant output (Peemans 1975, 151). Belgium continued to use coercion to enroll African villagers in the erection of public constructions, especially roads, which required a large amount of unskilled labor. On the other hand, Belgian governance underwent certain favorable transformations. The Belgians removed the conventional trade restrictions, such as the complex network of domestic pawns, tributes, workforce facilities, and other tolls that had been applied before. They introduced new expertise and occupations previously not

Chemins de Fer des Grands Lacs, c i.e. 800,000 hectares in the Kivu area. Lemarchand, Rene. 2023. *Political Awakening in the Congo: The Politics of Fragmentation*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 118.

available in tribal societies. Congolese individuals began to be employed in a variety of roles, including those of machinists, police sergeants, telegraph operators, hospital servers, clerks, carpenters, bricklayers, painters, postal workers, and a range of other similar roles. Consequently, the historical practices of the slave trade, pillaging, and piracy became obsolete (Gann 2015, 204-206).

In considering the working conditions in the field of mining, it is imperative to acknowledge the two variables that persisted throughout the colonial period, albeit with fluctuations in their implementation in accordance with economic trends. These variables can be illustrated by the exploitation of forced labor and the provision of minimal wages to the African workforce. Through the resulting revenues, the enterprises were able to yield substantial profits for Belgian and other holding companies, in addition to making a notable contribution to Northern economies (Ewans 2017, 242). However, the mining and other companies experienced challenging periods, especially following the First World War and during the economic downturn of the inter-war years. The first wave of massive recruitment through forced labor occurred between the end of the First World War and the crisis of the 1930s (mainly between 1920 and 1926), and the second during the Second World War (1940-1945). These practices gradually decreased after these periods (Huybrechts 2010, 47).
The fundamental inconsistency of the Belgian Congo was due to the fact that, as had been previously outlined in the first chapter, this practice was formally prohibited in the Colonial Charter.
Notwithstanding the illicit nature of the act, in 1917, the state approved an ordinance that foresaw the mandatory cultivation (*les cultures obligatoires*) of cotton and food crops[94] (Young 2015, 66). The male African population was required by decree to spend sixty days per year on paid or unpaid work. At the onset of the First World War, the colonial state, in concert with private capitalists, legitimized this practice by invoking the need to overcome what was perceived to be endemic ‘African laziness’. This potent ideological construct served to rationalize escalating levels of violence (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 185). During the Second World War, the duration of forced labor was even extended to 120 days and included some of the most important tasks previously performed back to the CFS, such as porterage and the collection of wild rubber (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 29). Farmers were compensated for their production according to fixed prices, instead of world market values. Under this system, African communities were required to cultivate an area of land each year, as determined by the Agricultural Service, which also determined the type of crops to be grown. Failure to do so was punishable by law.

[94] The main architect of Congo's agricultural policy, Edmond Leplae, argued that this coercion was a necessary part of the 'education' process. Despite this justification, however, the process continued in many cotton-growing areas three decades after the program began. Young, Crawford. 2015. *Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence.* Princeton University Press, 66.

The aim of the compulsory cultivation regime was to increase agricultural production for food and to diversify crops (Peemans 1998, 73). Notwithstanding the formally declared intentions of good faith, the system was not adequate for its stated purpose of developing a wealthy peasantry. In fact, the farmer's self-income remained meager, fixed prices curtailed the farmer's freedom of choice and decreased his economic incentives, dissatisfaction was widespread and so became resistance.

This system underwent significant development in 1936 with the introduction of '*paysannats indigène*', a novel approach that reorganized farmers into groups with the stated aim of enhancing their productivity. In practice, the *paysannat* schema gave the farmer a permanent right to a portion of land, as long as he stayed on the property and followed the required crop rotation cycle. However, the provisions of the decree were never implemented to this effect. The *paysannats* program necessitated considerable investment and was costly. Among its merits, it should be recognized that it counteracted the exodus from the countryside and increased agricultural production, even though the effect was highly differentiated from region to region (Kassa 1998,180). Indeed, according to Young (2015, 92), no Congolese benefited from these provisions. By 1938, an estimated one million Congolese were compelled to participate in agricultural labor, and as late as 1952, over 20,000 penalties were recorded, including fines or prison sentences, for failures to adequately perform the prescribed agricultural tasks[95] (Ewans 2017, 239).

The introduction of compulsory staple crops in the inner cities and the administration's low prices for this product shifted part of the social costs of low industrial wages onto the rural population. This was also a way of ensuring that the cost of living for African workers was kept low while maintaining a low-wage economy policy. Despite the colonial administration's efforts to encourage enterprises to increase wages, the minimum wage[96] introduced remained the maximum attainable wage for African workers. Still, this reform did raise the minimum wage, which increased from an average of less than two cents per day to one dollar in Leopoldville (Young 2015, 205-208).

Despite the fact that forced labor for private profit remained banned, the government emphasized that local administrators should ‘encourage’ Africans to work and that any government servant should be ‘an apostle of labor’; as it was voiced by the then Governor-General of Congo, Maurice Lippens (Macola 2021, 103). This ‘labor evangelism’ was coupled with the need for revenue

[95] The level of coercion was considerable, since, according to the 1947 Senate Commission's report, approximately 10 percent of the adult male population was in prison at some point, much of it for violating agricultural regulations. Young, Crawford. 2015. Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence. Princeton University Press, 67.

[96] In 1946, a survey conducted in Leopoldville revealed that 55 percent of wage earners received the legal minimum wage of $2.2 per day. Capelle, Emmanuel. 1947. *La Cité Indigène de Léopoldville*. Centre d’Etudes Sociales Africaines, 54.

to mold the colony's agricultural policy (Gann 2015, 202-203). During and following the Second World War, coercive measures such as flogging were employed to compel miners to labor in the mines, whose working conditions were deplorable. Particularly, the first generations of mine workers lived in very poor, unsanitary conditions. Miners were placed in work camps, away from the European residential centers of the cities, in compliance with a law of spatial segregation of 1913. The workers' dwellings resembled military camps more than urban districts, as they were obliged to sleep in the same huts, and drinking water was scarce (Van Reybrouck 2014, 167).

The mortality rate among workers was high (Macola 2021, 102), with dozens perishing annually due to factors such as brutality, disease, and despair. In order to gather a reluctant labor force, the government authorized some labor recruitment organizations, such as the *Bourse du travail du Katanga* (BTK)[97], and enforced minimum conditions concerning food and accommodation (Gann 2015, 198). The recruitment strategies employed after World War II exhibited notable similarities to those utilized during Leopold's reign. Mine recruiters used to travel to remote villages in the region, escorted by soldiers, and resorted to bribery and coercion to persuade people to migrate to the mines. Frequently, the local administration assisted company agents in the recruitment[98] and retention of villagers by imposing sanctions (Peemans 1980, 261). Individuals demonstrating resistance were systematically detained, physically restrained, and forcibly conveyed to the mines. Furthermore, workers were subjected to fines and imprisonment for breach of contract, and when an individual managed to evade this process, it was common for a family member to be imprisoned consequently (Gondola 2002, 87).

However, at the end of the 1920s, working conditions started to ameliorate. This positive shift is evidenced by a decline in the mortality rate at the *Union Minière in Katanga*, which fell from 20.2 percent in 1918 due to the influenza pandemic of the Spanish Flu, to 1.6 percent in 1930. Hospitals and medical centers were established. Housing, clothing, and nutrition greatly improved. Already in 1923, the situation had ameliorated, since workers were permitted to bring along their families. The workers' camps that housed employees of large mining companies became increasingly comfortable (Van Reybrouck 2014, 216-217). In fact, in the post-World War II period, a form of 'industrial paternalism' was developed by large companies. The provision of adequate housing, the payment of family allowances to workers, the construction of schools for children, and the establishment of social

[97] The BTK was a parastatal labor recruiting agency founded in 1910.

[98] In fact, there was a systematic political orientation that limited and hindered the development of small traders and settlers in order to keep labour resources available for state-sponsored enterprises or financial companies. Peemans, Jean-Philippe. 1980. "Imperial Hangovers: Belgium and the Economics of Decolonization." Journal of Contemporary History 15 (2): 257–86. https://doi.org/10.1177/002200948001500203.

care homes for women are indicative of the nature of the programs (Young 2015, 62). The 1950s can be regarded as a 'golden era' for Congolese workers, thanks to a significant increase in wages, although the gap between European and African salaries persisted at an average ratio of 1 to 25 (Peemans 1975, 152).

Paternalism had its obvious advantages as well as its liabilities in the form of the company's stabilization policy[99]. From the employee's perspective, the enterprise should have taken greater responsibility for their welfare, since it had taken away their mobility and flexibility in the labor market (Juif 2019, 327). Although Africans from different tribes and regions had been brought together, which resulted in differences in traditional habits of social and family organization, the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga wanted to create from the ground up a family model that would suit the tastes of the colonial trilogy: the colonial administration, private companies, and religious missions (in particular the Roman Catholic Church). Each tribe in the camp thus experienced the erosion of its traditional customs and had to adapt its family pattern to that of the company, a replica of the Western family in Africa. The productive and reproductive role of the family was thus taken over by the company (Dibwe Dia Mwembu 2001, 55). A statement that highlights this concept is to be found in a 1946 memorandum of Union Minière:

"*The colonizer must never lose sight of the fact that the Negroes have the souls of children, souls which mold themselves to the methods of the educator; they watch, listen, feel, and imitate. The European must, in all circumstances, show himself a chief without weakness, good-willed without familiarity, active in method and especially just in the punishment of misbehavior, as in the reward of good deed… (The European camp head) must interest himself constantly in the life of the natives, in their well-being; must guide them, examine their complaints; punish them when necessary with the tact, the calm and the firmness which are required*."[100]

This approach was rooted in the fact that, in the 1920s, the UMHK embarked on a new policy aimed at stabilizing its workforce near the production sites on the Copperbelt. The influx of fresh capital from Belgium following the First World War enabled it to embark on an ambitious industrialization program that demanded a larger and more disciplined workforce. The policy of stabilization mainly consisted of binding workers to their employer for as long as possible, in order

[99] This form of paternalism, which saw the Congolese as passive recipients of the state's charity, and the general improvement in their living conditions did not go hand in hand with an extension of their political rights. Macola, Giacomo. 2021. *Una Storia Violenta Potere E Conflitti Nel Bacino Del Congo (XVIII-XXI Secolo).* Rome: Viella Libreria Editrice, 127.

[100] Mottoulle, L. 1946. "Politique Sociale de l'Union Minière Du Haut Katanga: Pour Sa Main-d'Œuvre Indigene et Ses Résultats Au Cours de Vingt Années d' Application." Bruxelles: Institut Royal Colonial Belge.

to save money on wages for white workers and on the recruitment of Indigenous labor, avoiding high staff turnover. Therefore, the companies began to make long-term investments in the skills and health of workers and their descendants, to allow the production of subsequent generations of African workers at low costs. These benefits, in turn, increased employee satisfaction and the likelihood of reemployment (Juif 2019, 324). Particularly, the UMHK was authorized to organize its own recruiting missions, encouraging men to enter the mines with their wives and children.

Stabilization led to several structural transformations in the UMHKs. In the 'final' camps, even brick houses with iron or cement roofs were built for married workers (Macola 2021, 105). However, before reaching the final camps, the workers had to go through recruitment procedures involving medical tests, vaccinations, a ‘concentration camp’, and then a preparation camp (Rubbers 2019, 91). Following the Second World War, the camps were also provided with theatres, leisure facilities, and youth centers. Taken as a whole, the leisure activities were designed to counter inactivity, introduce new practices and values, control the camp population, and foster attachment to the *'Union Minière* family'. They played a role in the emergence of a more 'total' disciplinary regime (Rubbers 2019, 88-96).

This form of industrial or labor paternalism was also manifested in the bond between the employer and the African employee. In fact, the Congolese were employed according to the *contrat de travail* rather than the *contrat d’emploi*. Based on the former contract, the individual was subjected to particular penal sanctions in cases where they demonstrated a failure to fulfill their obligations or exhibited conduct that was deemed to be in violation of the terms of the labor contract (Young 2015, 65).

3.2. *The Socio-Economic Legacy of Decolonization*

The independence of Congo was a complex and multilayered historical event. On the one hand, the process of colonization brought about significant economic changes in the region, which were unparalleled in other African regions. However, concealed beneath this veneer of progress and restfulness, existed a stark contrast in reality. Evidently, the abundant mineral resources had generated substantial profits, elevating the standard of living for the Congolese populace and propelling the emergence of an African middle class. Conversely, a segment of the African elite recognized that the benefits of this economic growth were disproportionately enjoyed by European settlers, while they themselves remained in positions of subordination. Concomitant with the move by other colonies

towards the granting of self-governance to Africans, Belgian Congo maintained its paternalistic stance.

3.2.1. *Nationalism, Worker Grievances, and Economic Discontent*

In considering the impact of Western economic forces on the growth of nationalist sentiment in Congo, it is important to emphasize the close correlation between the two. It is questionable whether nationalism would have manifested itself in any other manner rather than through sporadic resistance movements, unless new values and ideas had already precipitated a transformation in traditional structures. The encroachment of modern, secular influences, coupled with the subsequent erosion of tribal bonds, participated in the emergence of a new class of évolués, consisting of clerks, merchants, artisans, and so on, who gradually moved away from the traditional order and became increasingly susceptible to the appeals of nationalism. The advent of the monetary economy and the development of industry gave rise to a series of racial, social, and economic grievances, which subsequently found expression in a nationalist sentiment (Lemarchand 2023, 95). The subsequent rebellions emerged as a consequence of a pervasive acknowledgment that the colonial regime was the catalyst for the profound and irreversible disorder. This perception, coupled with the miners' resentment, served as a catalyst for the emergence of a latent rural radicalism, particularly evident in regions where land expropriation, the establishment of extensive concessions, and plantations reliant on forced labor and compulsory crops were pervasive constraints (Peemans 1998, 237).

The emergent Congolese middle classes, comprising entrepreneurs, merchants, and artisans, held a particularly resentful attitude towards the oligopolistic structure inherent to the nation's economy. They perceived, with a degree of justification, that the entry of European enterprises into specific economic sectors had effectively denied them the opportunities they felt entitled to (Lemarchand 2023, 115). Nevertheless, these convictions scarcely succeeded in being translated into collective consciousness-raising, as is generally the case in countries with intricate trade union systems. Despite the economic and social conditions of the Belgian Congo being more advantageous than other regions of the continent for the development of a trade union movement, given the presence of a limited number of large enterprises, the Belgian Congo had one of the lowest numbers of unionized workers on the African continent. Of the 1,146,000 African workers registered at the end

of 1954, only 7,500 (i.e. less than 1%) were affiliated to a union[101]. The primary impediment to the proliferation of the trade union movement in the Congo was the colonial legal constraints, which permitted solely two categories of unions (Maurel 1992, 180-181).
Moreover, these unions had to include the presence of European councilors and colonial administrators, to circumvent the politicization of the workforce (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 76). It was only in the mid-1959 that European employers officially recognized trade unions (Peemans 1980, 270).

Furthermore, a significant issue was raised concerning job discrimination, particularly with regard to access to employment and the discriminatory provisions inherent in Congo's labor legislation[102]. This issue assumed particular significance during the 1950s, when a growing number of Congolese individuals attained the competencies required for access to higher-level job positions. Consequently, the question of whether these individuals should receive the same remuneration as their European counterparts arose. In addition, as discussed in the preceding chapter, even in the absence of a minimal number of university graduates, there was an increasing portion of Congolese who completed the humanities education cycle or an equivalent secondary education necessary for access to more advanced positions. The solution they found in the late 1950s was to grant European wage earners a 50 percent 'expatriations bonus', which in practice corresponded to a 'racial bonus'. This event sparked the fury of the students of Lovanium (Maurel 1992, 182-183). Finally, in January 1959, probably not spurred by the protests, and ten years after the law was first discussed, a new law was passed that applied European wage levels to all Congolese. Lastly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) had been pressing Belgium since 1939 to abolish the distinction in labor legislation between the employment contract for Congolese and that for Europeans. Belgium had promised the ILO that penal sanctions would be abolished by 1958, but it was not until independence that this provision was finally removed from the legislation (Young 2015, 95-99).

However, despite the pervasive insecurity, fear, and mistrust that characterized the lives of the Congolese, even before the emergence of a self-sufficient and self-confident class of *évolués*,

[101] This figure was significantly lower compared to the unionization rates of 23% in French West Africa, 25% in North Rhodesia (Zambia), and 50% in Nigeria.
[102] It is relevant, as well, to consider the African aspirations for land ownership, which were formally recognized by the Congo Free State's 1895 legislation on immatriculation but were never granted. After the Second World War, only the Katanga Special Committee granted a few pieces of land to Africans. Although a decree promulgated in February 1953 stated that the Congolese could enjoy property rights, the final decision was left to the provinces, which made very limited progress in this direction from the late 1950s onwards. Young, Crawford. 2015. *Politics in Congo: Decolonization and Independence*. Princeton University Press, 89-91.

economic grievances gave rise to several insurrectionary movements (Maurel 1992, 199). Early rebellions were driven by oppressive rubber collection methods, while later uprisings reflected broader peasant resistance to colonial rule. Resistance ranged from passive defiance to armed insurrection, often met with harsh repression. In urban and industrial centers, stark inequalities between African workers and European settlers fueled resistance through military mutinies, strikes, and arrests in key sectors such as mining, transport, and public services.

However, it was only after the Second World War that these demands began to be formulated collectively, through the medium of voluntary associations, and, at a later stage, incorporated into a political agenda. Congolese called for higher wages, better jobs, and increased prices for producers in the agricultural sector. These uprisings can be interpreted as a consequence of the significant war effort[103] (*effort de guerre*) that occurred between 1940 and 1945, which, as previously mentioned, raised the number of forced labor days. During the Second World War, the Congo was required to increase its production of rubber and minerals, which were of significant strategic importance to the Allies (Kisangani 2022, 83). This period was characterized by considerable sacrifices and military support from the Congolese, contributing to the strengthening of collective consciousness among the Congolese population[104] (Peemans 1975, 156). However, it is crucial to recognize the presence of an anti-colonialist sentiment that manifested during this period. In response, Belgium employed a combination of force and social and economic programs aimed at ameliorating the situation (Huybrechts 2010).

The elimination of forced labor after the war was not enough to calm tempers. Concurrently, expatriate firms had unintentionally fostered the emergence of a class of *évolués* who exhibited a mounting sense of urgency to substantiate their claims to ‘equal pay for equal work’ (Lemarchand 2023, 111-112). The most significant urban insurrections prior to 1945 included the 1941 miners' strike in Katanga, the 1944 uprising in Kasai and Katanga, and the 1945 strike and demonstration by the port workers in Matadi (Maurel 1992, 178-179). The first of these was the UMHK miners' general

[103] The immediate consequences of the war effort were many. First, there were strikes, riots, and mutinies. Secondly, it exacerbated the rural exodus, which further depopulated the villages and worsened the housing conditions in the agglomerations, which turned into slums. Then, it contributed to the reappearance of certain endemic diseases (trypanosomiasis, leprosy, venereal diseases) and local epidemics, followed by famine and malnutrition due both to the shortage of imported consumer goods during the war and to the increase in prices. Finally, there was a negative impact on education, with a reduction in school attendance and the number of schools in the villages, which exacerbated the backwardness of vocational training in the cities. Huybrechts, André. 2010. *Bilan Économique Du Congo*. Editions L’Harmattan, 49-50.

[104] In this period, a number of pressure groups were formed with the objective of articulating the demands of elements that shared common grievances. The most notable of these was the Association du Personnel Indigene de la Colonie (APIC), which was founded in 1946 by a group of clerks working in the administration. In 1957, the organisation's Statut Unique, stipulated that individuals possessing equivalent qualifications from both Europe and the Congo should receive equivalent remuneration, privileges, and opportunities for career progression.This demand aligns with the sentiments previously expressed in 1956 by the editorialist of *Conscience Africaine*.

strike of 1941, which took place in Likasi and culminated in the massacre of Lubumbashi on 9 December 1941, resulting in the deaths of over 100 strikers (Van Reybrouck 2014, 250-252). The second rebellion in the region followed a similar trajectory. The 1944 insurrection marked the first significant challenge to Belgian colonial rule, advocating for reforms across all social classes (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 49-53).

Even if Belgium employed a combination of force and social and economic programs aimed at ameliorating the situation, it is crucial to recognize the presence of an anti-colonialist sentiment that manifested even during this period. These grievances of unfair wage policy and generally the economic recession that began in 1957, which led to a growth of unemployment, were part of those resentments that led to the riots of January 1959. This factor proved to be pivotal, as it led to the transition from economic claims being expressed on an individual basis to their articulation in political terms, with reference to the concept of economic emancipation (Maurel 1992, 203) (Lemarchand 2023, 114). Consequently, the pursuit of economic equality with Europeans became the overarching claim, superseding all others and being prioritized by the *évolués*. The previously accepted justifications regarding the lower productivity of Africans, the unfeasibility of attaining European salaries, and the impracticability of achieving a comparable lifestyle were no longer considered valid (Maurel 1992, 202-203)

3.2.2. *The Last-minute Belgian Maneuvering*

Initially, it was not fully clear whether the Belgian colonial administration had paved the way for the transfer of political power with the aim of retaining economic control of the established regime through an independent neo-colonial state. The Belgian government's original proposal was that a Congolese state with domestic autonomy would have to set up its own independence before deciding what shape it should assume. The riots of January 1959 eventually persuaded the Belgians that independence had to be declared as the ultimate objective of colonial policy, so much so that in October 1959, Auguste de Schrijver set a time limit of four years until independence, which clearly did not turn out to be an accurate prediction. The Belgian Congo was generating foreign currency revenues that covered the economic deficit in Brussels, which made the Congo of paramount importance to UMHK's shareholders. There was growing concern about the consequences of independence in the particular region of Katanga, then largely dominated by reactionary settlers (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 220).

As of the end of October 1959, the balance of payments had reached a deficit of 5.8 billion francs. This was indicative of a capital outflow. It is estimated that 5.3 billion francs exited the Congo during the initial nine months of 1959. This long-term capital flight was indicative of the concerns expressed by Belgian financial groups regarding the future political developments in Congo[105] (Mukoko Samba 2021, Chapter 4.4). However, as early as 1956, there was a beginning of disinvestment, as soon as the prospect of increased Congolese participation was raised. The majority of this early 'flight of capital' was likely composed of savings from private individuals and smaller enterprises. By 1959, even the *Société Générale de Belgique* had expressed the same concern and perhaps intention, by causing *Union Minière* to declare a larger dividend than usual. On the one hand, the financial companies were hoping to strike a deal with the emerging Congolese political class, which would require their expertise. On the other hand, any solution that might weaken the newly independent state was welcome, if it meant that their continued presence could be further entrenched. In this way, the Belgian state and the financial companies were compelled by common interests to become partners against the Congolese authorities, conceiving the idea of what would become 'development aid' (Peemans 1980, 273).

A pertinent example of this phenomenon can be observed in the period preceding independence, when the *Compagnie du Katanga* formally requested the withdrawal of its shares from the CSK, thereby effectively dissolving its involvement with the company. The CSK had been a vehicle through which the government had exercised its influence over *Union Minière* by appointing directors to its board for the preceding sixty years. Now, it prevented the Congolese state from obtaining this link with UMHK (Wolfe 1966, 372).

Three months before the 30 June 1960 deadline, Congo's financial situation was critical. This prompted the Belgian government to seek loans to finance the extraordinary budget. Government officials recognized that, while Congo had previously contributed to Belgium's resources, it would now begin to represent an economic burden. This was due to the fact that, although the balance sheets had been positive until 1956, the country had suffered the effects of the global recession from 1957

[105] During the 1950s and 1960s, there were repeated instances of late colonial and post-colonial currency instabilities and investments being withdrawn from regions including the Belgian Congo, but also China, Malaysia, South Africa, and Angola. The phenomenon of 'capital flight' was perceived as problematic enough to motivate development economists at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to attempt to record and quantify these outflows. This was a period when multilateral institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) were meticulously recording capital inflows to developing countries as strategies aimed at fostering economic growth. Ogle, Vanessa. 2020. "'Funk Money': The End of Empires, the Expansion of Tax Havens, and Decolonization as an Economic and Financial Event" The Past and Present Society 249 (1). https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtaa001, 226.

onwards (Kisangani 2022, 110). This had a negative effect on reserves and resulted in an increase in foreign debt. On the other hand, by the time Congo achieved independence, it had reached a highly enviable level of development. Therefore, the situation of public finances could have just required austerity measures, for which the Belgian administration had shown little inclination (Bertieaux 1961, 529).

The disruption to the former climate of confidence and security resulted in a decline in export earnings, and, more significantly, private investment ceased almost entirely, leading to the repatriation of capital to Europe, which had already commenced, exerting an influence on the balance of payments. Specifically, on 31 December 1959, the Congo Treasury had cumulative resources since 1950 amounting to 61,960 million, after covering extraordinary expenditure and deficits in the ordinary budgets from 1957 to 1959, with a remaining balance of only 680 million. The 1960 budget was only balanced thanks to a contribution of 2.7 billion francs from Belgium. By this time, Belgium had realized that the Congo contributed little to the state coffers, i.e. it constituted less than 5% of the Belgian gross national product in the 1950s (Brassinne and Dumont 2010, 70-74).

At the Political Round Table Conference, convened to prepare the ground for Congolese independence, it was stipulated that a separate Economic Round Table Conference should be convened to address economic, financial, and social issues that had been excluded from the agenda in January and February. This Conference saw leaders from Belgium and the Congo meet in Brussels between January 20th and February 20th, 1960. However, many Congolese leaders, including Lumumba, did not attend, due to their engagement with electoral campaigns. The discussions at stake were mainly the status of companies in which the colonial state was a shareholder and the colonial debt, estimated at BF 46 billion or USD 7.33 billion[106] (Kisangani 2022, 147).

Regarding the handover of the economic rights to the colonial state, the most exemplificative litigation was regarding issue of the future of the *Comité Special du Katanga* (CSK) and the strategic allocation of the Congo's investment portfolios (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 221). The Katangan plan, which coincided with foreign private interest, was still approved during discussion with few reservations. An agreement was reached between Congo and Compagnie du Katanga to settle CSK's assets. According to the agreement, CSK would be liquidated and Compagnie du

[106] These issues, together with the issue of a large proportion of the land and mineral rights, initially granted to foreign corporations, were known as the *Belgian-Congolese Contentieux* or Litigation.

Katanga's shares in UMHK, which were in CSK's portfolio, would be returned to CK[107]. On 27 June 1960, just three days before Congo became independent, the Belgian government approved the agreement by decree. The potential threat to Belgian capital posed by the prospect of UMHK falling under the jurisdiction of the independent Congolese government was averted on 27 June 1960, when the CSK was finally dissolved by the Belgian government (Young and Turner 2013, 284). However, it was not decided what would happen to the other two-thirds of CSK's assets, which would remain under the control of the Belgian government until the concessions expired. Ultimately, however, this agreement deprived the independent Congo of the opportunity to control the powerful CSK and kept the UMHK under private control (Radmann 1978, 29-32). This dissolution concretely led to the new republic losing indirect control over UMHK, despite holding a two-thirds share in the company (Kisangani 2022, 148).

Secondly, anticipating capital flight after independence, the Belgians planned to transfer the colony's public debt to the newly independent state of Congo (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 88). Belgian investments in the colony amounted to $3.5 billion, but the loans they had taken out were on foreign bond markets. The first payments on these loans, which were due to start after independence, would have accounted for 23 percent of Congo's budget expenditure. The new state would thus have inherited a huge debt at the dawn of independence. The debt load was also settled definitively. The Congo would take over the old internal colonial debt (titles issued on the Congolese market for a total of 23 billion francs), while Belgium undertook to settle the colonial debt covered by state guarantees and issued on the foreign market (11 billion francs) (Vanthemsche 2012, 219). Moreover, shortly before independence in 1959, the *Fédération des Entreprises du Congo* (FEC) was established[108], which consolidated the interests of predominantly Belgian colonial companies. It emerged as a product of two significant organizations representing colonial business interests: the *Association des intérêts coloniaux belges* (AICB) and the *Association des intérêts industriels au Congo* (AIIC) (Brassinne and Dumont 2010, 77-78).

However, the most relevant strategic maneuver, was implemented by Belgium a couple of weeks prior to independence, on 17 June 1960, and entailed the legal sanctioning of the transfer of firms that were registered in Congo under Congolese legislation to be governed by Belgian law, while

[107] In addition, the Compagnie would receive one third of the improved land from CSK and one third of the future revenues from the mines already allocated by CSK. The Compagnie would also receive compensation of one billion Belgian francs.
[108] Anticipating the political problems that would follow independence, the FEC established five provincial business associations (Léopoldville, Katanga, Kasai, Equator, Eastern provinces), with a high degree of local autonomy.

keeping their headquarters and position in the Congo. This law made the business officially ‘foreign’, making it harder for Congo to control and tax these businesses (Vanthemsche 2012, 245). This provision was implemented since enterprises were worried about the future legal and tax status of the country after independence (Declercq 2023, 82). Not surprisingly, many companies opted for Belgian nationality and set up subsidiaries to which they transferred their activities and the exercise of their land and mineral rights.

A salient example is the UMHK, which formally transitioned into a Belgian company on 23 June 1960 (Kisangani 2022, 148). This operation, which had the effect of strengthening the legal basis of the metropolitan companies, was intended to allow them to avoid the constraints and control of the new state.

In order to comprehend the progression of these events, it is essential to move a little further forward in time, specifically recalling the *'Tshombe and Spaak Convention',* which was signed on 6 February 1965, between the Kingdom of Belgium and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The aim of this agreement was to settle questions relating to the public debt and the assets of the Belgian colony of Congo. It also aimed to negotiate the transfer of ownership of the securities forming the Belgian Congo portfolio to the emergent Republic, after they had been confiscated for almost six years (from 17 June 1960 to 6 February 1965) (Radmann 1978, 33). However, despite the transfer of Congolese assets, the headquarters continue to be located in Belgium, and some securities were even returned. In fact, in accordance with Article 15 of the Convention of 6 February 1965, only the assets of certain companies were handed over. In the case of the UMHK, the Congolese state obtained only 17.95 percent of participations (Declercq 2023, 82).

3.2.3. *The Relationship between UMHK and the Katangese Secession*

In 1960, Katanga had a population of 1,709,659, representing approximately 13 percent of the country's total population (Congo's Office of Statistics, 1960). It was one of the most poorly populated provinces in Congo, yet it was also the province with the highest number of European settlers. In 1956, approximately 31 percent of Congo's total European population resided in Katanga. The province's European population was negligible in 1924, with only 4,824 recorded, and increased to 11,341 by 1947. This growth was sudden, with the population increasing to 31,847 Europeans in Katanga by 1958. In fact, it was during the 1950s that the total value of its mineral production

exhibited a 57 percent increase, ascending from 5,569.3 to 8,764.5 million Belgian francs (Lemarchand 2023, 233-234). With its production of copper and cobalt in particular, Katanga accounted for 75 percent of Congo's mining output, which amounted to 11.8 billion francs or about 17 percent of the country's national product. Katanga had a virtual monopoly in this sector (Roosens 1983, 106).

The most contentious event leading to the rupture between Belgium and Congo was the secession of Katanga. The series of events that occurred provided indisputable evidence that the Belgian government had been untruthful in its promises to grant independence to the Congo, and that they were determined to exercise dominion over the country in a neocolonial manner (Gondola 2002, 119). In fact, despite the absence of an official declaration of support for the secession of Katanga by Belgium, which was probably prevented by prudence in international relations, several indications suggest that the secession was perceived as a favorable opportunity for the Belgians. The proclamation of the secession of Katanga on 9 July led to the Belgian community being divided on the question of recognizing Katanga's independence.

Domestically, the Liberal Party advocated for the recognition of Katanga. Instead, the Socialist Party supported the gradual withdrawal of Belgian troops, while UN decisions were generally encountering opposition (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 96- 98). Incontestably, the secession of Katanga and South Kasai in July, where *Union Minière* had most of its affiliates and operated, producing more than 7 percent of the world's industrial diamonds, constituted a blow to the financial structure of the state. This was exacerbated by the dismantling of the CSK and the withdrawal of $100 million in private capital during the previous year, coinciding with an escalating public debt in the Congo throughout the process of financing a substantial economic development plan initiated by the Belgians in 1949 (Wolfe 1966, 372-373).

The considerable concentration of economic resources within the borders of Katanga, as well as the substantial ownership of capital by a single expatriate company, the UMHK, clearly gave rise to political implications. Every stage of Katanga's development, from generating and transporting energy to mining and processing raw materials, gradually came under the control of a small group of foreign businessmen, including the UMHK (Gonze 1962, 5). Consequently, they were fearful of the consequences of independence. As a preliminary postulation, it is to be accepted that Katanga's reliance on Belgian expertise and investments indicates that the success of secession was contingent, at least in part, on Belgian interests' support. Moreover, Katanga's economic grievances, particularly

in comparison to other provinces, had long been a source of profound discontent among the local population (Lemarchand 2023, 235-236).

In examining the succession of events that led to the Katanga secession, it becomes evident that the situation was highly complex, with numerous actors involved, each pursuing their own interests. On the one hand, the catalyst for secession was clearly the emergence of political parties in Katanga. What prompted the Katanga people to organize the *Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga* (Conakat) [109], in November 1958, was the constitutional reform introduced in 1957 by the Statut des Villes. This reform assigned representation to Baluba elements from Kasai, which the Katanga tribes considered 'foreigners' (Roosens 1983, 104). It is evident that the anti-European stance adopted by the Conakat leaders was directed towards the provincial administration, with allegations of favoritism towards the Kasaians being a prominent theme (Lemarchand 2023, 236-238). Regional disparities in the allocation of economic resources operated to exacerbate latent tensions between ethnic groups, thereby resulting in economic stratification that often coincided with tribal divisions. Consequently, sectional and tribal antagonisms can be regarded as manifestations of underlying economic grievances. A further competitive factor is the role played by white settlers in making the idea of secession economically attractive and politically significant (Lemarchand 2023, 246-248).

Secondly, Conakat was the recipient of substantial financial support from influential corporate entities, including the UMHK[110]. As seen before, the UMHK was controlled by the powerful *Société Générale de Belgique*. For the SGB, its economic interest would have been jeopardized by unfavorable political developments in Katanga. According to statistics, the rupture of ties with Congo, and particularly Katanga, would have resulted in a loss of approximately 30 percent of the overseas operations of transport and insurance firms, as well as the loss of around 77 million dollars of revenue derived from investments (Gondola 2002, 120). Consequently, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the secessionist effects of the Katanga leaders might have succeeded, if had they not been sustained, both

[109] It is evident that this support was not directed towards a political party that possessed a decisive majority of the Katangese population within its ranks. This was due to the fact that, in truth, only a small part of the region was in favor of the secession. From a statistical perspective, a slight majority of Katangese voters supported Tshombe in the 1959 election, with his CONAKAT party securing 25 seats in the 60-seat assembly. His primary opponent, Jason Sendwe, who advocated for a unified Congo, received 18 seats. Within the secessionist enclave of Elizabethville, Tshombe garnered only 8,000 votes, while his opponents received 12,000, underscoring the division within the electorate. Gonze, Collin. 1962. "Katanga Secession: The New Colonialism." *Africa Today* 9 (1): 4–16.

[110] In 1961 and 1962, more than 80 percent of the secessionist state's income came from the three and a half billion francs that the UMHK paid into Katanga's treasury. This means that, without the UMHK's contribution, the Katanga regime would never have been able to cover the costs of its military and administrative apparatus. Macola, Giacomo. 2021. *Una Storia Violenta Potere E Conflitti Nel Bacino Del Congo (XVIII-XXI Secol*o). Rome: Viella Libreria Editrice, 147.

morally and financially, by Belgian interests (Macola 2021, 147) (Lemarchand 1962, 412). Belgium's position, however, was ambivalent. On the one hand, it was willing to acknowledge the secession and offer assistance to the regime in Elisabethville. However, following the UN's intervention in Katanga in August, Belgium repudiated the notion of Katanga's independence and instead advocated for the establishment of a Congolese confederation, comprising regions such as Katanga, the mineral-rich southern Kasai, and other Congo provinces deemed 'reliable' by Belgium (Boehme 2005, 3).

Moreover, in evaluating the nature of the relationship between European interests and political groups, it is crucial to acknowledge that the Europeans did not form a homogeneous bloc. For example, while there were strong connections between the Conakats and the white settlers through the *Union Katangaise*, the links between the Balubakats and the Belgian liberals, were initially due to the presence of individual figures in the Belgian Socialist Party, as already pointed out (Lemarchand 2023, 242). Moreover, other numerous Western countries were significantly invested in Katanga's economy and thus maintained a close observation of the political developments in that region. For example, France, Italy, and West Germany were dependent on Katanga for raw materials. The United States, as well, had vested interests in Katanga. Certainly, secondary to Belgium and the UK, Katanga was the source of about three-quarters of their cobalt and half their titanium imports (Roosens 1982, 375).

According to the research of David N. Gibbs[111], the U.S. pursued pro-colonial policies during the late 1940s and 1950s, and actively opposed independence for the Congo, on the grounds that a self-governing Congo would not guarantee access to Congo's mineral wealth as had been the case under Belgian rule (Gondola 2002, 120). For instance, the United States government was cognizant of the secessionist intentions of the leader of the Katanga revolution, Moïse Tshombe, who was the head of the Conakat tribal political party. The US State Department itself noted that the secession of Katanga, supported by European involvement, could safeguard mining investments in the region, thereby aligning with Western interests.

This reasoning was also adopted by British and Belgian industries. In fact, following the declaration of Katanga's secession on the 11th of July, initiatives were already underway to bolster European support for Tshombe's new state. It was a recurring phenomenon in the historical context of the Cold War era, that socio-economic concerns regarding the maintenance of the Western *status quo* were often articulated through a discourse surrounding fears of communist expansion or Soviet influence,

[111] Gibbs, David N. 1991. *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

despite the presence of tangential or non-existent threats (Bandeira Jeronimo and Costa Pinto 2015, 222-228).

3.2.4. *The Impact of Colonialism, Africanization, and the Education-Development Link*

As we previously observed, after the Brussels Conference set the date for Congo's independence, Belgium embarked on a massive disinvestment. The capital was massively transferred to the metropolis. The colonial state's coffers were emptied. Even before its emergence in the international community, the new state was deprived of the resources necessary for its policies. This devastating act plunged the state prematurely into an economic crisis. In fact, the economic turmoil played an important role in aggravating the political crisis (Ngoie Tshibambe 2014, 82). Moreover, the sudden departure of Belgians led to an immediate difficulty in managing the state's resources and finances. For example, the 1961 cotton harvest resulted in a mere 7,000 tons, in contrast to the average annual output of more than 50,000 tons over the preceding six years. A similar pattern was observed in rice production, which is known to have been influenced by government policy regarding individual Congolese farmers. In 1961, it decreased to 54,000 tons, compared to an average of nearly 175,000 tons in previous years. These reductions appear to be attributable primarily to the dissolution of the government agricultural program, rather than to the collapse of the commercial economy (Van Reybrouck 2014, Chapter 8). This is evidenced by the negligible impact of the events related to independence on rubber production. Indeed, rubber exports in 1960 and 1961 both exceeded 35,000 tons, approaching the average of the preceding four years (Wolfe 1966, 375).

These results can be attributed to the fact that, when independence came, the Congolese lacked sufficient technical expertise. This shortage stemmed from the Belgians' lack of support for the education or training of highly skilled Africans. Indeed, Belgian colonial policy repressed the development of Indigenous intellectual, political, and economic capacities, keeping Africans out of top positions. The adjustment process was so protracted that even when Mobutu decided to nationalize the copper mines in 1966-1967, the Congo state still had to request technical assistance and guidance from UMHK to manage the mines, a request that came at a considerable cost (De Villers 2016, Chapter 3). Moreover, political turmoil throughout the first five years of independence (1960-1955), in part bolstered by foreign interference, severely weakened economic stability and deteriorated the investment climate. Upon his appointment as Prime Minister in 1960, Patrice

Lumumba's rise to power was met with apprehension by both the Belgian government and Société Générale. This was primarily due to Lumumba's perceived alignment with radical nationalist policies and the possibility of him becoming an ally of the Soviet Union, a concern shared with the United States. And the Belgians, instead of lending support to the Congolese government, backed the secessionist agenda of the rich provinces of Katanga and Kasai (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 242-244).

The economic growth of a country is closely related to the level of education provided, and *vice versa*, economic growth drives the expansion of education. In order to assess the efficacy of an economic system, it is necessary to consider not only the development of technology, but also the efficient management of labor. In this regard, while the Congolese economy was under the jurisdiction of concessionary companies, the responsibility for education was held by missionaries. Without reiterating the educational scheme, which has already been addressed in the first chapter, it is necessary to emphasize how, from a technical point of view, the skills taught to the Congolese were controlled and limited to the needs of the international division of labor (Kisangani 2022, 117). After primary school, secondary education led to vocational programs such as training for farmers, carpenters, teachers, and bricklayers. Although the first universities were established in the late 1950s, Congo lacked engineers and lawyers when it became legally independent in 1960 (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 66-75).

Moreover, recalling the stabilization policies of the mid-1920s, government regulations also required companies to ensure that their services provided and funded at least basic educational opportunities for the children of workers in cooperation with the missions. Thus, apart from the technical training that was given to workers, corporations financed some schools, among which the *Union Minière* supported six primary schools run by catholic missionaries. However, miners were free to choose protestant schools if preferred. School enrolment in the camps was very high, reaching 80 percent, and the rate of girls attending school was well above the colony average. Primary education was virtually compulsory, and mothers who did not send their children to school were penalized by the loss of food rations (Mottoulle 1946). Other large companies that provided education and professional training, in coordination with the missions were *Les Huileries du Congo Belge*, (Harris 1946, 422-423), *Géomines, La Compagnie Minière des Grands Lacs,* and *Les Sociétés Minières et de Transport in Katanga* (Juif 2019, 319-320). Another field where the companies did provide funding to the missions was in healthcare, in order to increase the birth rate and reduce infant mortality (Harris 1946, 418.)

A further major issue was the marked variation between firms' Africanization policies, which exhibited a broad spectrum ranging from superficial symbolic gestures to genuine endeavors to advance and train locally hired personnel (Maurel 1992, 272-273). On the one hand, there were players such as the *Banque du Congo*, which, even before independence, had a staff of 10 percent Congolese employees and bank officials, a figure that rose rapidly to around 40% by the end of 1963. Some of its branches were run exclusively by Congolese staff, and the *Banque du Congo* organized training courses in Kinshasa for this purpose. On the other hand, the largest mining company, UMHK, did not begin its process of Africanization until after 1960, slowly promoting a minority of Congolese workers into senior and technically advanced roles. Four of the 15 seats on UMHK's board of directors were filled by Congolese, and the number of African employees also gradually increased during 1965. A Decree Law of 30 August 1965, later revised by the Kasavubu government, introduced a new Investment Code, which provided for the elimination of all forms of discrimination. In particular it banned those based on the nationality of investors, for companies established and concessions granted after the entry into force of this new Code (Radmann 1978, 34). The nationalization of the UMHK mines in 1967 did not immediately reverse this trend. Indeed, it was not until eight years later, in 1976, that the Gécamines achieved parity between foreign and Congolese workers. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some companies made almost no effort, especially in the agri-food sector, one of the largest sectors, at least in terms of the number of companies. As in the public sector, colonial efforts to Africanize the workforce in the private sector began very late, around the mid-1970s. (Declercq 2023, 92).

In conclusion, to sum up the impact of decolonization on Belgium by observing that the economic rupture was not sudden. Rather, Belgium gradually disengaged from the economic fabric of Congo. Industries that were deeply rooted in the colony had time to adapt to the new circumstances. In fact, the relationship between the two nations adjusted relatively smoothly, and, contrary to some pessimistic projections, there was no economic catastrophe or significant unemployment. This is an intriguing outcome given that Belgian propaganda had portrayed the Congo as "*essential to Belgium's greatness, wealth and even 'moral survival'*" (Vanthemsche 2012, 266).

3.3. *Mobutu's Failure to De-colonize Business in Zaire*

The overarching economic theme during Mobutu's regime can be encapsulated by the Zaireanization of industries and of the Congolese economy in general, a phenomenon that commenced in 1973, together with the plague of resulting economic difficulties. In spite of the economic reform initiatives promoted by the IMF, the World Bank, and bilateral donors, Zaire continued to be trapped in a growing cycle of debt. By the end of 1990, the country's total external debt amounted to about $10 billion. The prolonged decline has had a devastating impact on agriculture and local infrastructure, in addition to the economic austerity (Leslie 2019, 113). This clearly demonstrates that the overarching objective of the dictatorial regime was to enhance its bargaining power in relation to foreign capital, thereby providing the newly emergent ruling class with a relatively robust economic foundation (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 148). The term 'emerging ruling class' is used here to refer to the system of patronage established around Mobutu, a factor that has been shown to contribute to the deterioration of an economy that had previously survived independence well.

3.3.1. *The Economics of Oppression*

Throughout the years of Mobutu's authoritarian regime, the foundations and methods of extraction and governance were not fundamentally altered, and pre-colonial and colonial patterns carried on into the post-colonial period to stabilize the regime. Initially, there were grounds for economic optimism. Even if economic performance was poor until 1967, a series of reform measures were implemented, including a devaluation of the currency and fiscal reform, which improved the situation. From 1967 to 1970, the economy exhibited a growth rate of approximately 10 percent per annum. All sectors except agriculture exhibited high levels of growth during the period in question (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 78-79). In the 1960s, minerals were the most significant export product, and the primary source of revenue for the government, and the abundance of resources combined with high world market prices ensured solid economic growth. Concurrently, the terms of trade underwent a period of improvement between 1964 and the early 1970s. From the 1970s onwards, however, there was a sharp decline, due to unfavorable policies and unpredictability of commodity prices (Callaghy 1984, 196).

The most serious issues were directly related to the inadequately diversified mining economy, which was focused on rent-seeking. Since the market for copper became even more volatile over the course

of Mobutu's regime, it could have been countered by incentives toward diversification[112]. However, he failed to diversify the exporting market, with dramatic consequences on the growth rate of per capita income, which became lower than at the time of independence (Dunning 2005, 465-467). The consequence was a growing reliance on foreign goods, strengthened by Mobutu's ineffective policies for agriculture (Hacker 1991, 52).

The economic crisis of the early 1970s caused world commodity prices to plummet and Congolese trading conditions to deteriorate dramatically. Furthermore, Mobutu instigated a process of de-commodification of the economy, resulting in an inefficient equilibrium devoid of investment. However, he simultaneously engaged in megalomaniac infrastructure projects[113] (i.e. the Inga-Shaba high-voltage power line[114]), which were poorly implemented, leading to an increase in public debt (Frankema and Buelens 2013, 29-30). It is essential to provide further clarification on the issue of infrastructures, since the projects envisaged were not endorsed for the benefit of the general citizenry. Mobutu demonstrated a particular reluctance to engage in the development of technology with the potential to challenge his authority, since he "*believed that investments in economic infrastructure, including those as simple as maintaining the network of roads left by the Belgian colonials, would pose a threat to his hold on political power by facilitating collective mobilization against his regime*" (Dunning 2005,465).

Despite the escalating debt, which remained unaffected by successive austerity policies, the regime consistently garnered support from Western countries, at least until the conclusion of the Cold War. In fact, among the biggest supporters of the regime was the United States, which began providing aid to the Congo following independence and favored Mobutu's own establishment. Military aid was

[112] However, it is remarkable that Zaire's reliance on resources only increased over the period of Mobutu's rule. Indeed, between the years 1961 and 1978, the percentage share of the three most exported minerals (topped by copper) increased significantly, from 52 to more than 91 per cent of total exports.

[113] The proposed "mega-projects" included the Inga project, the large-scale steelworks at Maluku, and a high-voltage line spanning 1,800 kilometers between Inga (in the west) and Shaba (Katanga, in the southeast). The financial plan for these projects included repayable loans through interest payments and mining revenues. Frankema, Ewout, and Frans Buelens. 2013. *Colonial Exploitation and Economic Development: The Belgian Congo and the Netherlands Indies Compared*. London: Routledge, 242.

[114] The Inga-Shaba project accounted for most of Congo's original debt. The plan was to exploit the undoubted hydroelectric potential of the Congo River in its 300-metre drop between Kinshasa and the sea, with a 1,800-kilometre high-voltage direct-current transmission line to the Katanga mining area. However, the project ended up costing four times more than originally estimated and was completed five years late, at a time when low copper prices were destroying the new mining projects on which the project's economic viability depended. In essence, the project was designed so that the key players (Mobutu and the main contractor) would benefit from the deal, leaving the Congo and its citizens to bear the costs in the long term when revenues fell far short of debt servicing requirements. Young, Crawford. 2004. "The End of the Post-Colonial State in Africa? Reflections on Changing African Political Dynamics." African Affairs 103 (410): 23–49. https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adh003.

the main mechanism through which Zaire obtained defense materials and equipment, as well as other services. Characteristic elements of the relationship between the two countries included aid conditionality[115], the promotion of economic liberalism, and the need to contain communist expansion in Congo (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 114).

Moreover, from the moment of nationalization, the Belgian political and financial community pursued a policy of close and multifaceted cooperation with Kinshasa, increasingly institutionalized through state-to-state relations, with the development of loans, credits, and the financing of significant technical assistance in both the civilian and military fields. At the end of the 1960s, this cooperation reached its peak with the signing of a bilateral loan agreement between Belgium and Zaire. This framework of cooperation generated a favorable environment for the involvement of financial groups in Zaire's major projects (Peemans 1980, 280), which clearly explain Belgium's benevolence towards Mobutu[116]. Preserving amicable relations with the Congolese president had the potential to result in lucrative business agreements, which, in turn, could have facilitated employment opportunities in the constituencies where the relevant contractors were based (Vanthemsche 2012, 225).

The process of nationalization was the hallmark of the regime's economic policy. This process was initiated by Decree No. 66-341 of 7 June 1966. This provision made it compulsory for the head offices of companies incorporated under Congolese law to be located in the Congo (Declercq 2023, 82). The decree made such transfers mandatory by January 1, 1967. This reform initiated a more determined policy of replacing non-African managers with Congolese managers. From then on, President Mobutu made no secret of his ambition to create a new class of Congolese entrepreneurs, and this led to what was later announced to be the Zaireanization of the economy (Mukoko Samba 2021, Chapter 5.2).

Moreover, by this law, also known as the *Bakajika Law*, Zaire regained full control of all its land, forest, and mineral rights granted or ceded to third parties, legal or natural persons, before 30 June

[115] The primary characteristic of military conditionality was the utilization of US military aid for national security and self-defense exclusively. The government of Zaïre was prohibited from employing American aid for any offensive purposes. A further significant condition was the opening of Zaïre territory to American military missions. The prevailing economic condition was the promotion of economic liberalism and the expansion of trade with nations that were aligned with the United States. The political conditionalities emphasized anti-communism and non-alignment, while a multitude of additional conditions were in place. Mpwate Ndaume, Georges. 2010. *La Coopération Entre Le Congo et Les Pays Capitalistes: Un Dilemme Pour Les Présidents Congolais - 1908-2008*. Editions L'Harmattan, 149-152.

[116] To better illustrate the complex economic ties that held the two countries together, I will use the case of SOMINKI as a brief example. SOMINKI, created in 1976 through the merger of other companies, dominated the mining sector in South Kivu. Although SOMINKI was often mistakenly considered to be state-owned, it remained majority Belgian-owned and escaped the process of nationalization, with the Congolese state holding only 28% of the shares. Its gold was refined in Europe and largely sold to the Congolese central bank at fixed prices, in line with colonial practice. Radley, Ben. 2023. *Disrupted Development in the Congo: The Fragile Foundations of the African Mining Consensus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 46-48.

1960. The country then proceeded, in a self-determined manner, to distribute the rights to exploit or manage its natural, forest, and mineral resources. Belgium's refusal to transfer the UMHK's headquarters from Brussels to Congo led to its nationalization on 1 January 1967 (Mpoy Kadima 2019, 133-134). Later on, on June 30, Mobutu expressed made a speech characterized by a conceptual embrace of the aforementioned policies, stating that political independence had no meaning without economic independence (Radmann 1978, 35).

3.3.2. *Farewell to UMHK, the Rise of Gécamines*

Since 1966, the regime has pursued a systematic agenda of state engagement in the productive sector, culminating in scenarios where the state exerted comprehensive oversight over capital assets. A particularly notable instance of this phenomenon is the transformation of *Union Minière* into a public enterprise (Peemans 1975, 160). The nationalization of UMHK occurred after two months of negotiations, on 1 January 1967. The immediate causes appear to have been, on the one hand, the irritation of the Congolese authorities in the face of the foreign currency crisis, most of which was being retained by the mining companies, mainly by UMHK, thanks to the 'conventions-exporters' that allowed the exporting companies to keep part of their export earnings (40 percent for UMHK). On the other hand, there was UMHK's decision to raise the price of copper and their refusal to transfer the head office to Congo (Radmann 1978, 35-36). However, the matter was of paramount relevance considering that, in 1965, the assets of UMHK were evaluated at 21.3 billion Belgian francs ($430 million) and the company was responsible for the provision of 50 percent of the Zairian state revenues and 70 percent of Zaire's foreign exchange (Young and Turner 2013, 291).

The UMHK, which had opted to become a Belgian company just before 30 June 1960, refused to meet the Congolese authorities' demands according to the Ordinance No. 66-341 of June 7, 1966. Negotiations failed, and on 31 December 1966, the Congolese government announced the creation of the *Société Générale Congolaise des Minerais* (Gécomines), later *La Générale Congolaise des Mines* (same acronym) and after 1972, La *Générale des Carrières et des Mines* (Gécamines) (Gondola 2002, 144-145). Gécomines was 60% owned by the Congolese state, while the remaining 15 percent were offered to the Tanganyika Concessions and 30 percent to the public (Radmann 1978, 37). However, this deal division failed and Gécomines became a fully-owned state company (Young and Turner 2013, 292). Gécomines took over the assets of UMHK, which was liquidated. UMHK went so far as

to paralyze mining production and organize a complete blockade on the marketing of Gécomines' products (Mukoko Samba 2021, Chapter 5.1).
Finally, an agreement was met on 15 February 1967. It stipulated that Belgian involvement in the strategic copper and cobalt mines of Katanga would have persisted through a technical and marketing agreement between Gécomines and the *Société Générale des Minerais* (SGM), for marketing and technical assistance. SGM was , a subsidiary of the *Société Générale* family, and would continue as a service provider to the new state-owned company (Declercq 2023, 82).

The decision to nationalize UMHK was regarded more as a political maneuver than an economic one. President Mobutu's primary objective in nationalizing UMHK was to consolidate his power and eliminate the financial support that UMHK provided to opponents of his regime. Although Zaïre had secured 60 percent of the shares and left 40 percent to foreign partners, Belgium strongly opposed Zaïre's decision, and relations between the two countries deteriorated (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 173). The UMHK affair was significant, since it showed that the financial groups could only maintain their presence in the country if they submitted to the ambitions of the new regime and recognized it as a valid partner in the decision-making process. It was also a demonstration of the fact that the support of the Belgian state was indispensable in the new negotiation process, and that close collaboration with the United States and Western multinational institutions was also necessary (Peemans 1980, 280).

Conversely, the foreign involvement in the mining sector remained constant (Leslie 2019, 107). Most importantly, the affair is even more complex in nature. Under the terms of the agreement, Zaire was granted significant symbolic satisfaction through the UMHK's acceptance of Gécamines as a state company for the management of mining operations, and through the UMHK's complete exclusion from the Gécamines management contracts (replaced by the SGM). Ironically, the arrangement proved very profitable for UMHK. Since SGM received up to 6.5 percent of Gécamines' sales and only 1 percent was needed to reimburse itself, while the rest was in effect a remuneration for UMHK. As a matter of fact, UMHK's annual reports show that its earnings in Zaire were unaffected by the nationalization. It earned 8 billion francs from 1960 to 1966 and 8.5 billion francs from 1967 to 1973 (Young and Turner 2013, 292-294).

The new company Gécamines dominated the production landscape in Zaire, accounting for over 90% of the country's copper output, as well as the entirety of its cobalt, zinc, and coal production. Despite rising inflation, Gécamines workers continued to enjoy a higher standard of living than the

rest of the population, largely due to the various services provided by the company in its camps. They modernized the camps that they inherited from the UMHK, even if it was not sufficient to cope with the housing shortage caused by the increase in the workforce. Additionally, a liberalization of camp life occurred. Workers could spend the night in the city, take a second wife, or receive relatives at home (Rubbers 2019, 92). In the 1970s, however, Gécamines was faced with unfavorable economic conditions that jeopardized its development plans. In addition, Mobutu's regime began to redirect the company's earnings for political ends, bypassing the budgetary restrictions imposed by the international financial institutions. The 1970s marked the decline of Gécamines economic influence and prominence in copper production, from which Mobutu had illicitly acquired 240 million. This event signified the conclusion of the previously favorable trajectory of the economy [117](Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 121-124).

3.3.3. *The Nationalization of the Economy and Its Consequences*

The application of the *Bakajika law* and the nationalization of UMHK were the main reasons for the Nationalization, Zaireanization, Radicalization, and reorganization of several other companies. These measures were designed to give the State greater control over the economic apparatus and its substantial portfolio. All these measures have profoundly altered the structure of Zaire's portfolio, both in terms of public and semi-public companies (Mpoy Kadima 2019, 134). Seven years after the nationalization of the *Union Minière*, the Zaireanization was the government's decision to nationalize foreign businesses and transfer them to Zairian ownership. Following the success of the 4 October speech in New York, the government decreed *Zaireanization* on 30 November 1973, with the aim of advancing the conquest of economic independence. It involved the seizure of small and medium-sized businesses owned by foreigners, including Belgians, Greeks, Portuguese, Italians, Pakistanis, and West Africans (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 149). Mobutu declared that starting from 1975, all foreign private companies operating in Zaire would have been required to have a Zairean president (Radmann 1978, 42). The Zaireanization measures are widely regarded as one of the most significant manifestations of the patrimonial relationship between Mobutu, foreign capital, and the political aristocracy. This is evidenced by the transfer of foreign enterprises from their

[117] In the following years, mining production fell dramatically, and the same happened for copper production, which switched from 499,421 tons in 1987 to a mere 25,000 tons in 1995, due to the increasingly competitive market. The copper market was replaced by the diamond extraction market, which, in 1995, already accounted for 47% of export earnings. Renton, David, Leo Zeilig, and David Seddon. 2013. *The Congo: Plunder and Resistance*. London: Zed Books, 150.

original ownership to private individuals, rather than their actual acquisition by the state (Callaghy 1984, 191).

The majority of companies were, therefore, acquired by individuals occupying the uppermost echelons of the regime, including, incidentally, Mobutu himself and members of his family (Leslie 2019, 105). However, the implementation of this reform proved problematic due to the absence of an economic class with experience in business management. According to the new measure of *Radicalization,* announced on 30 December 1974, the state was represented at the head of each enterprise by 'a general delegate'. However, rather than serving the enterprise, the delegate tended to take advantage of their position. Acknowledging his previous misjudgment, he opted to reinstate the former executives, thereby enabling them to re-establish authority over their respective enterprises to the tune of forty percent. However, the majority declined, citing concerns over the erosion of trust (Diangitukwa 2001, 98). Moreover, with the Ordinance-Law no. 78/002 of 6 January 1978, Mobutu created a new organization of the state portfolio management, creating bodies to administer the various sections, namely the *Conseil d'administration*, *Comité de Gestion*, *Personnel*, *Organisation financière* and the *Collège des Commissaires aux Comptes* (Mpoy Kadima 2019, 135-139).

To sum up, Zaireanization and Radicalization represented the final, bold push to expand the regime. Zaireanization was an attempt to achieve economic independence, while Radicalization was a desperate gamble, attempting to address the accumulated problems of rising Mobutism. The measures were truly revolutionary if considered in their goal to amputate foreign domination over a large part of the economy. According to Young and Turner, It was probably the most far-reaching and comprehensive set of nationalization measures ever undertaken in independent America (Young and Turner 2013, 361).

However, the negative impact of Zaireanization became quickly evident. Businesses were allocated in a disorganized manner at both regional and central government levels, which often resulted in multiple claims for ownership. Many new owners, acting dishonestly, quickly sold off inventories or abandoned the businesses when they realized they couldn't manage them, since they were holding multiple offices at the same time (Young and Turner 2013, 339-340). This led to widespread tax evasion, layoffs, and unpaid salaries, which caused a substantial contraction in the commercial sector. In agriculture, the distribution of plantation facilities led to the disruption of operations, paralyzing production. As a result, shortages, hoarding, and inflation began to rise. In this context, the interventions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were aimed

at promoting the market economy in Zaire[118]. Their action was coordinated, since while the World Bank was mainly concerned with the funding of development projects, the IMF centered on economic policy changes. Significant interventions were undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s. By 1975, Zaire's debt had reached $887 million, a development that provoked alarm among American, European, and Japanese banks. Consequently, private banks concluded that IMF involvement was the only viable means of financial rehabilitation (Van Reybrouck 2014, 363-366). The Zairean government initially resisted IMF intervention but ultimately agreed in 1976, agreeing on a devaluation of the Zairian currency, wage stagnation, and a reduction in state spending. Zaire did not accomplish the agreed objectives, even though agreements s were renewed and extended until the late 1980s (Mpwate Ndaume 2010, 139-142). In conclusion, it can be stated that, valuating its repercussions, the program was a colossal failure, to such an extent that it was definitively abandoned as early as 1976 (Macola 2021, 191).

3.3.4. *Kleptocracy: between clientelism and patrimonialism*

Zaire serves as a paradigmatic example of corruption and embezzlement, thus rendering the term *Kleptocracy* a frequently employed epithet to describe the Mobutu regime. To a certain extent, the embezzlement of the state can be ascribed to the venality of specific individuals and the magnitude of Mobutu's personal wealth. However, this phenomenon can also be attributed to the consequences of an entrenched institutionalization of clientelist practices in government, which then clearly required funds to be maintained (Macola 2021, 196). According to Nzongola-Ntalaja (2013, 152), the deterioration in the economic situation was not attributable to a technical problem and the absence of technical skills among the populace *per se*, but rather to the utilization of available skills. The empirical evidence demonstrates that 50-75 percent of foreign currency continued to escape the IMF-controlled central bank, thereby highlighting the ineffectiveness of the IMF in the face of Mobutu and his kleptocracy's commitment to defending its own interests.

[118] In the 1980s, underdeveloped countries faced a debt crisis, which prompted them to seek aid and debt relief. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) offered assistance but imposed certain conditions known as structural adjustment policies. These conditions included devaluing the national currency, removing or loosening controls on exchange and imports, imposing limitations on bank credit, increasing interest rates and reserve requirements, reducing public spending, implementing tax hikes, eliminating consumer subsidies, dismantling price controls, imposing wage restrictions, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and facilitating foreign investment. These policies were intended to address the financial challenges faced by these countries and promote economic stability. However, they were also criticized for their impact on the social well-being of the population, as they often led to austerity measures and reduced public services. Yongo-Bure, Benaiah. 2020. *Regional Development Poles and the Transformation of African Economies*. Routledge, 44.

We can trace this behavior as a consequence of a broader concept, namely that of the notion of Patrimonialism, which truly comes into its own during the period of Zaireanization, as it provides the conceptual framework for understanding the quest for the failure of the Zairian state. It is from this period onwards that terminological inflation prevails to qualify Mobutu's rule. Notable among these are patronage, clientelism, factionalism, and nepotism, which are critical in analyzing the regime. The period is characterized by the proliferation of social and political pathologies, including corruption and cronyism. The pervasive corruption that permeates the entire political system becomes the pivotal explanatory factor in understanding regime politics (Diangitukwa 2001, 99-100). According to Max Weber, the concept of patrimonialism entails the confusion of the domains of public and private law by the holder of power. Wealth is inextricably linked to personal power, and the relationship between the holder of power and the submissive is characterized by a personal bond, underpinned by loyalty to the leader (Weber 1922).

De Villers (2016, Chapter 4.3) asserts a close linkage between neo-patrimonialism and 'clientelism', suggesting that the former is a *condicio sine qua non* for the latter. The personal and private utilization of public power enables the exploitation of such power for partisan ends. The Zaireanization of foreign assets is a strategic move on the part of the state to exercise control over resources and is achieved through the deployment of loyalty and submission techniques (Leslie 2019, 123). This program has resulted in a pronounced divide between the political elite and the general population. As a matter of fact, the extractive and punitive features of the patrimonial state have proven to be outperformed by the colonial state in terms of unsatisfying the vital needs of the population. For a period of nearly three decades, the populace has been wholly excluded from the benefits of autonomy, whilst their standard of living has undergone a gradual deterioration since 1975, and the rising cost of living has compounded this decline. Furthermore, widespread economic chaos was precipitated by the looting episodes of 1991 and 1993, which resulted in significant destruction to the modern economic sector and the subsequent loss of employment for thousands of workers (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 151).

Zaire has been observed to have exhibited a systematic approach to corruption, characterized by the actions of a kleptocratic elite, transactions with the state that were rife with corruption, and the accumulation of substantial personal wealth by Mobutu and select associates (Young and Turner 2013, 400). It could be said that corruption was almost institutionalized under Mobutu, to the extent that one of his favorite practices was that of reshuffling the government, which turned out to lead to

great mismanagement of the public sector, since, with the awareness of the very short duration of governments, even at the territorial level, rulers ended up serving their personal interests (Kisangani 2022, 190).

Such elements aggravated the economic crisis, which stretched back to the 1970s but peaked in the early 1990s. This crisis accelerated at a paced rhythm. Between 1975 and 1978, the Zairian economy experienced a contraction of approximately 3.5% per annum, aggravated by the rapid decline of copper, the material at the heart of the country's post-independence growth, whose prices collapsed (Renton, Zeilig, and Seddon 2013, 121-124). The regime quickly lost its international credibility. Its bargaining power with its creditors and foreign protectors diminished sharply. Forced to renegotiate its debt, it had drastic conditions imposed on it to restructure its administration and control public spending (Peemans 1998, 220-221). Indeed, to renegotiate its debt maturities with Western creditors, he had to abandon the policy of Zaireanization and was forced to grant the International Monetary Fund (IMF) the right to monitor the functioning of the Bank of Zaire (Macola 2021, 195). The agreements repeatedly failed, and inflation exceeded 100%, the budget deficit grew out of control, foreign investment collapsed, and the foreign debt soared to over $10 billion (Gondola 2002, 151). In the 1990s, Zaire's political transition led to institutional stagnation and a prolonged economic crisis, exacerbated by a break with international financial institutions (Rigobert 2022, 45). GDP growth fell sharply, while hyperinflation and reduced trade volumes created a vicious economic cycle. Despite Belgium's own recession in 1991 and reduced cooperation due to political tensions, trade between the two countries continued, although Zaire remained a marginal partner in Belgium's overall trade balance (Sumata 2014, 47-48).

Conclusion

This chapter explores the expansion and concentration of corporations during the colonial era. It commences with an examination of the establishment of corporations and continues by analyzing the consequences of the full potential of mining being realized in the 1920s, which led to a sharp increase in labor intensity. According to research of the Université Lovanium, Centre de Recherches Économiques, I.R.E.S., the relationships between the economic and the political are close and uncontested. The economic and the political both seek, in the organization of men and things, to achieve their own objectives. In this quest, the autonomy of the sectors remains precarious and mutual influence is noteworthy. Based on circumstances, they either cooperated or asserted dominance over

the other. At the beginning of the penetration of a capitalist economy into a society that is foreign to it, and possibly hostile, the help of political power is generally favorable (Université Lovanium, Centre de Recherches Économiques, I.R.E.S. 2019, 35-36). Indeed, throughout the body of this chapter, one can observe this relationship, which, however, unlike that between state and church, was less ambivalent, but rather interlocked, as it was without conflict of interest.

The focal point of the chapter, and what emerges, is again the interlocking character between the state and the enterprises, to the point that Kisangani talks about the Belgian Congo as a "*portfolio capitalist state*" (Kisangani 2022, 143). To assess the essence of this investigation, two key variables need to be considered. Firstly, it is evident that the state generally required a substantial proportion of shares in companies. The colonial state exercised a high degree of control over the industrial management of the land through the medium of holding companies. This control was further entrenched by the state's representation on the boards of directors, thereby ensuring a direct and indirect influence on decision-making processes.
Indeed, the overwhelming majority of large-scale enterprises were subsidiaries of a small number of giants holding companies, the most notable of which was the *Société Générale* de Belgique, the primary Belgian control vehicle. It exercised control over BCK railroad, the *Compagnie du Congo pour le Commerce et l'Industrie*, *Compagnie Cotonniere Congolaise*, *Geomines*, *Compagnie Pastorale de Lomani*, *Compagnie du Kasai*, *Forminiere*, and, most importantly over the *Union Minière* (the list is not even exhaustive). The outcome of this concentration was the domination of 70 percent of the Congolese economy (Young 1966, 36).

Secondly, it has been demonstrated that the colonial administration was actively engaged in the provision of the necessary support to grant large areas of land, and in the active recruitment of laborers, often by force. This closely interconnected and interdependent relationship was enabled primarily by the limited number of enterprises that exercised substantial control and proprietary interests over the industrial and mining sectors. Indeed, despite the potential for competition among Belgian financial groups and interests in the colonial economy, the establishment of Union Minière du Haut Katanga in 1906 by the CSK represented the state exerting its full power, employing various forms of constraints and pressures to undertake large-scale public works, while mobilizing a substantial labor force for mines and large plantations to drive exports. Therefore, it can be stated that the colonial administration effectively promoted exports in order to provide support to Belgian industry by mobilizing inexpensive labor.

To understand the extent of colonial exploitation and social injustice, an analysis of working conditions and discrimination was undertaken. The indigenous Congolese were economically marginalized, while the small European population (1 percent of the total) owned 95 percent of the capital assets and accounted for 50 percent of the national income. Finally, the giant companies operating locally held the overwhelming majority of the state's economic resources, including land. *Union Minière* alone accounted for 70 percent of the government's foreign exchange requirements and 50 percent of its budget revenues (Leslie 2019, 101). The cumulative effect of these trends was a system that soon showed the first signs of stress. The economic grievances that emerged in response to a repressive system subsequently became a significant driving force in the formation of political parties, which found in those demands a common sentiment of reprisal against the colonial power deemed to be unjust.

The impact of the massive expansion of social services began to be felt as public debt rapidly accelerated, investment from Belgium slowed dramatically, and capital flight began in the face of Congolese independence. Decolonization, conceived in economic and financial terms, thus marked a transitional period during which old capital was partly removed, and new capital had to be mobilized, arriving in the form of official aid and private investment (Ogle 2020, 214-215). The departure of European capital and know-how, in a period of uncertainty and political upheaval during decolonization, paved the way for the complicated relationship of interdependence between the newborn Congolese state and private capital. A clear example is the secession of Katanga, which was predicated on economic, rather than cultural, factors. As reasoned by Lumumba-Kasongo (1992, 32), in the event of success, the secession would have resulted in the formation of an independent Congo, which would have been a dependent partner to private companies that were running the economy, favoring Belgian interests. Moreover, the arrangements resulting from the agreement of 27 June 1960 were not very favorable. In fact, with the dissolution of the CSK, the Congo had to take responsibility for the colonial debt and set up a repayment fund.

It is also interesting to note the change in the relationship between the state and business under the regime of Mobutu Sese Seko. To recapitulate the key points, the origins of Zaire's widespread corruption can be traced to Mobutu's ruling ideology, which combines patrimonial authoritarianism with a nationalist *credo* that goes by many names (from Nationalization, Mobutism, Zaireanization to Authenticity), but essentially uses ancestral nationalist tendencies to legitimize the ultimate power of the "chieftain" (Hacker 1991, 53). With the nationalization of *Union Minière*, the regime apparently

wanted to emancipate itself from the state-enterprise scheme that had taken root in the colonial period. Yet, Belgium still managed to increase the state coffers, through the agreements between Gécamines and the *Société Générale des Minerais* (Lumumba-Kasongo 1992, 45). It is evident that the prominent financial groups of Belgium have succeeded in preserving a substantial influence over the economy of Zaire, thereby safeguarding their own interests to a considerable extent. Indeed, according to Irogbe (2013, 234), the history of the Congo is an illustrative example, especially during the second republic, of how western multinational companies and governments often support repressive regimes, as long as these are favorable to economic and corporate interests. In conclusion, it can be argued that the government of Mobutu was corrupt and plundered the nation's wealth, encouraged by the interests of Western powers. Moreover, a profound impact of Mobutu's Zaire lies in the millions of Zairean citizens driven into misery and desperation, and the destruction of the future of entire generations in the process (Gondola 2002, 152).

Conclusion

« Sans indépendance, point de souve-raineté sans dignité, pas de liberté sans justice, nul ne peut avoir la dignité et par-dessus tout, sans indépendance, il n'y aura point un homme libre »

« Without dignity there is no liberty, without justice there is no dignity, and without independence there are no free men »

Patrice Lumumba, Letter from Thysville Prison, (Lumumba [1961] 2021)

The present thesis is situated within the context of the colonial (1908-1960) and post-colonial (1960-1997) periods in the Democratic Republic of Congo, with a focus on the actors involved in these historical dynamics, specifically Christian missions and business firms. While the analysis of scholars' colonial and postcolonial perspectives would undoubtedly be relevant and interesting, it would also represent a significant diversion. This difficulty arises from the fact that discussions on the merits and demerits of colonialism and its impact on societies have been ongoing since the onset of colonialism itself. Yet, the fabrication of *the Other* within the colonial milieu, as delineated by Mbembe, is a compelling subject worth exploring in concise terms. The philosopher, Africanist, and historian underscores how, within a colonial framework, the colonizer frequently depicts the colonized as inferior and as a stereotyped psychic object. This portrayal serves to justify domination and exploitation, leading the colonized individual to internalize this representation and suffer a loss of identity and self-worth. The legitimization of colonial conquest and the perpetuation of the colonial system rely on the establishment of racial divisions and subjugation. Hence, racism, characterized by the denial of the humanity of the colonized, maintains a dynamic of oppression in which the colonized are seen as 'other than themselves,' as beings who are not equal (Mbembe 2019, 48-52). Moreover, Mbembe stresses that the violence embedded in the political strucure of democracy is directed outward towards the colonies, manifesting as brutal acts of oppression (Mbembe 2019, 20-27).

The colonialist discourse embraced African society in a complex and often contradictory manner, even regarding capitalist forces. As Chapter Three demonstrates, the colonial structure of enterprises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was intricately intertwined with the colony from its earliest period under Leopold II and throughout Belgian rule. In a similar manner, the consolidation of Christian missions occurred during Leopold's rule since it even served to legitimize the

establishment of the colonial system itself, as outlined in Chapter Two. The present analysis emphasizes the enduring nature of the architectures of both missions and business companies, which were on-the-ground realities of the colonial state. In the colonies, as Valentin Mudimbe observes, the colonial system encompassed the dominion over space, the reformation of indigenous mindsets, and the restructuring of local economies (Mudimbe 1988, 15). In relation to the missions and enterprises, the second and third chapters provide a comprehensive delineation of their structural configurations, including their internal divisions, relations with the state and colonial administration, and their behavior during colonial rule and following independence. Young is the leading theorist, quoted by several other authoritative authors, of that which he refers to as a 'colonial trinity', stating that:

> "it is important to recognize that not only was this triple alliance a virtually seamless web, but each component, in its area of activity, was without peer in tropical Africa in the magnitude of its impact" (Young 2015, 10).

Young's theory of the 'colonial trinity' elucidates the manner in which power in colonial Congo was administered through a close collaboration between the administration, the church, and big business, each with its own interests and a defined role in the colonial society. However, as independence became more imminent, around the time of the publication of the 1956 Manifesto of African Consciousness, the interests of these actors began to diverge, thereby leading to the gradual unraveling of this system.

Other proponents of the 'colonial trinity' include René Lemarchand, who also contended that Catholic missionaries were able to extend their activities well beyond the boundaries of evangelization, assuming *'a semi-official role*' (Lemarchand 2023, 125). Dunn refers to it as a '*triumvirate of state-Church-business',* which formed the '*foundation of the colonial rule'*. He even asserted that the state was overshadowed by the other two subjects (Dunn 2003, 71). Also, Nzongola-Ntalaja points out to the Belgian rule as a '*colonial trinity of the state, the Catholic Church and large companies*' (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 3).

The study examined the validity of the "colonial trinity" model, delineating the salient outcomes that substantiate this theory, along with the discrepancies that have been identified.

First, the relationship between the state, the missions, and businesses developed through similar channels. This resemblance can be attributed to the foundations laid and concessions made by Leopold II, which were subsequently substantially reaffirmed by Belgium. Colonialism was initially justified in terms of a 'civilizing mission', with the objectives of this endeavor being the establishment of Christian morality and the promotion of capitalist commerce. The Belgians sought to exert control

over various aspects of society through these two pillars, including sexual reproduction, gender roles, language, spirituality, labor organization, and spatial settlement (Lösing 2020, 67).
In both instances, the state cooperated with the missions and businesses through a simple expedient. The colonial government, which wielded exclusive dominion over the territory and its population, granted concessions of land within designated territories to various missions and enterprises (Fabian 1991, 73). In the specific case of the missions, this agreement was formalized in a Convention between the Vatican and the independent state of Congo, signed on 26 May 1906.
On the other hand, by virtue of the same land concessions, large companies established themselves in Congo. These companies, such as the *Société Générale de Belgique*, controlled most of the colonial economy, and were particularly active in the mining sector, having a huge influence on the state, with an extensive personnel turnover between the colonial administration and their leadership. Private companies were thus instrumental in the process of colonial exploitation, maintaining a close relationship with the authorities (Young 1966, 36).

Conversely, the missions were also regarded as pivotal instruments for Belgium, as they were considered indispensable allies in the transformation of Congolese society. The Catholic Church expanded its missionary activities through educational institutions such as schools and stations, promoting European values. The Church's missionaries sought to instill a new mentality among the indigenous population, emphasizing obedience to authority and the adoption of Western cultural norms (Young 1966, 35). In fact, in addition to land grants intended for commercial cultivation to support missionary activities, the missions were the beneficiaries of considerable subsidies from the colonial administration (with Catholic missions being favored over Protestant missions). The church's influence, particularly in the domain of education, was pervasive both territorially and sociologically, as it was entrusted exclusively to the missions for most of the colonial period. Education was of paramount importance in the colonial context, since the authorities sought to exercise control over the ideological content of teaching in order to prevent the emergence of anti-colonial sentiment.

The territoriality and occupation of space by the missions are comparable to the impact of the enterprises. Indeed, the division of territory into economic and social areas, which was dependent on the state, prioritized the various sectors of the colonial economy. In turn, the state was reliant on the colonial companies for its tax revenues, and the agreement between the colonial companies and the state constituted a power block independent of any effective political control. As demonstrated, under Belgian rule, the state held stakes in the capital of the colonial companies, either in return for assets contributed or in exchange for mineral rights granted.

Indeed, according to Jean-Luc Vellut, the colonial state was considered a *'state-holding'*, which is evidenced by the fact that in 1954, mining and transport accounted for over 60 percent of all state holdings in private enterprises. In the case of transport, this participation was secured through capital contributions. Furthermore, between 1899 and 1958, public capital accounted for 45 percent of investments in Congo's major transport companies (Vellut 1982, 317-318). In contrast to its indirect involvement in the mining sector, the central administration assumed a more active role in the politics of agricultural societies, as evidenced by the institution of forced cultures and *paysannats*.

A further domain in which a high level of collaboration was witnessed between the state and enterprises was observed in the sphere of labor recruitment, which frequently resulted in acts of violence. Especially, in the context of mining enterprises, the colonial administration provided material support that proved to be indispensable for the recruitment of cheap labor. Despite its distinct characteristics, a comparable practice can be identified within the missionary context. Indeed, the colonial administration promulgated a decree that permitted Catholic missions to 'host' orphans and abandoned children. Evidence suggests that religious groups reliant on state support engaged in the systematic recruitment of children, if not forced conscription, which often also served to obtain labor power. Furthermore, Nzongola-Ntalaja contends that the triad can be observed in action during the period of resistance to Kimbanguism (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2013, 49). In this instance, the colonial alliance of the state, the Catholic Church, and major private enterprises reacted expeditiously and with considerable vigor to counter the movement and suppress a form of native messianic thought that exhibited nationalistic elements.

Finally, a recurrent common theme that has been repeatedly observed throughout this thesis is the rhetoric of colonial paternalism. As is evidenced in other colonial contexts, colonial rule in this specific case was characterized by an authoritarian and, profoundly, paternalistic nature. The phenomenon of Belgian paternalism can be explained as a strategy employed by the colonial state to assume a dominant, pervasive, and omnipotent role within the Congolese spatial domain. The initial appeal was articulated through the civilizational theory of society, which foreshadowed and subsequently endorsed the pervasive establishment of Christian missions (Maseland 2017, 261). From this standpoint, colonial rule was regarded not merely as a means of benefit for the colonial powers, but also as something that was intended to be in the best interests of all the empire's subjects. The 'White man's burden', as articulated by Kipling in 1899, was to bring civilization, technology, and progress to regions of the world that would otherwise be deprived of these benefits (Kipling 1899).

However, it would be erroneous to assume that paternalism was just a characteristic inherent to the state. Given the state's limited financial and logistical resources, it was compelled to collaborate with the Church and Belgian corporations to establish a facade of hegemonic control. Therefore, a similar paternalistic rationale was manifested in the conduct of Christian missions and in the major enterprises established to finance the colony and its colonizers.

In the case of business corporations, paternalism was employed and exemplified by firms such as *Union Minière*. The UMHK implemented comprehensive welfare policies as a component of their stabilization measures, providing their laborers with access to housing, healthcare, education, and other social benefits (Vanthemsche 2012, 30). This welfare system, characterized by its comprehensive nature, can be understood as a manifestation of paternalistic principles. On the other hand, paternalism was strongly embedded within the missionary framework. The Catholic missions, in particular, adopted a paternalistic approach towards the Congolese by taking care of every aspect of their lives. This included education, the distribution of food, and the supervision of work. In essence, through the missionary school system, they focused on forming 'good Christians', emphasizing obedience, docility, and trust in authority.

This tendency has been observed to extend even beyond the colonial period, with the rule of Mobutu serving as a notable illustration. Drawing parallels with the discourse employed during the colonial era, Mobutu utilized a remarkably similar rhetorical style, thus underscoring the endurance of this ideological framework. As a matter of fact, several historians have examined the Zairian regime's (1965-1997) employment of the same rhetoric and symbolism, as well as the same violent repression, in a manner analogous to that of the colonial state (Young and Turner 2013) (Callaghy 1984).

All of the aforementioned elements serve to substantiate the existance of the triumvirate between state-mission-enterprises. However, it is important to note the presence of points of contrast between these three entities, which demonstrate that, despite the apparent closeness of this connection, it had become weaker towards the time of independence.

I posit that these tensions, which are more accurately attributable to the relationship between Belgium and the missions, were pivotal to the latter's endurance after the colonial period and in the formation of a Congolese political consciousness. Therefore, the subsequent points delineate the impact of missions and enterprises on the decolonization process.

The first signs of struggle between the church and state took place in the final years of colonial rule for control over the direction of education. Boyle held that the rupture with the colonial

administration occurred in 1954-1955, when Auguste Buisseret assumed the role of Minister of Colonies. This development culminated in the episode that has come to be known as the *'lutte scolaire'* (Boyle 1995, 451-452). However, Loffman contends that the School War was, in fact, a phenomenon that was confined to the larger metropolitan cities in the Congo or the spheres of power in Belgium. In particular, he argues that the populace continued to perceive a close relationship between the church and state during the late colonial period (Loffman 2019, Chapter 8). The research findings reveal that the phenomenon either represented the first partial rupture, or, alternatively, led to a divergence of intentions to become evident.

However, the main breaking point was substantiated by the church's support of the advent of expressions of emancipation and independence, as evidenced by the Bishops' Declaration of June 1956, in support of the *Manifeste de la Conscience Africaine*, which expressed the urgency of preparing the Congolese population for self-government. As a matter of fact, it is possible to observe that, rather than serving merely as an instrument of colonial power, Christian missions contributed to the formation of a national consciousness and political mobilization through the promotion of education. This argument is held by Jean-François Bayart and Romain Bertrand, who have examined the role of religious institutions in the formation of the post-colonial state. In their work, Bayart and Bertrand (2006) highlight the significant role played by Christian missions during the colonial period, often operating in a manner that was autonomous from the state. I would argue that this interconnection was too closely aligned for the church to ever constitute an emancipating role from the state, but it demonstrated an autonomous role starting at the end of the 1950s.

It can thus be concluded that the church played a partial role in the development of Congolese political consciousness in two ways. Firstly, it exercised control over a significant proportion of the educational infrastructure, which led to the formation of the class of *évuolés*, who, while reflecting European ideals, nurtured an internal yearning for independence. Secondly, it supported the initial publications that advocated independence, driven by a need for survival and adaptation. Nevertheless, it is evident that both Christian missions and commercial enterprises played a pivotal role in the formation of a national identity that ultimately led to the attainment of independence on 30 June 1960. Indeed, the enterprises' paternalistic policies contributed to the emergence of collective protests and demands for concessions by workers, who increasingly resisted unfair wage policies and racist prejudices that prevented them from attaining higher positions. The economic grievances emerged as a consequence of the repressive system and developed into a significant driving force in the formation of political parties. These parties identified a common sentiment of dissatisfaction with the colonial power, which they regarded as unjust.

These concepts are exemplified in the speech delivered by first elected Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba in the day of independence on June 30, 1960:

> "Our lot was eighty years of colonial rule; our wounds are still too fresh and painful to be driven from our memory. We have known tiring labor exacted in exchange for salary which did not allow us to satisfy our hunger, to clothe and lodge ourselves decently or to raise our children like loved beings. We have known ironies, insults, blows which we had to endure morning, noon, and night because we were "Negroes."
> quoted in (Merriam 1961, 353) and (Dunn 2003, 66).

Finally, it is of particular interest, during the period of independence, to observe the marked divergence of attitudes between the religious missions and the financial groups. While the church demonstrated a certain degree of support for the Congolese, the financial groups, during the process of decolonization, sought to ensure the protection of their future interests. This divergence is exemplified by the Katanga secession, wherein the prominent and influential *Union Minière*, a major player in the region's economic landscape, endorsed the secessionist movement in the prosperous Katanga province, a move that also found support from Belgian interests.

Thus, after having explored how these two actors had an impact on the decolonization process, it can also be argued that, to a certain extent, the sources demonstrate the persistence of the two colonial-era power structures in the post-independence era. Peermans (1980, 274) elucidates that even if the combination of colonial authoritarianism and paternalism resulted in the system disintegrating when independence was achieved, the Church and the financial groups demonstrated a remarkable enthusiasm to adapt to the erosion of their hegemony and to defend their respective positions and interests. It is, therefore, possible to posit that the influence of the missions and corporations survived independence, albeit under less favorable conditions than they enjoyed under Belgian colonial rule. Although the 'trinity' had been dismantled since 1960, the missions and enterprises played a key role, albeit a contentious one, even during the dictatorial regime.

The prevailing and authoritative position of the missions, which had been firmly established during the period of colonization, represented a significant challenge to the autocratic regime, as it was capable of exemplifying the form of authority and mass influence that Mobutu sought to emulate. For this reason, he attempted to impose himself as a sacred figure through the implementation of the measures of Authenticity and Mobutism, eliminating any Christian elements from the daily lives of citizens of Zaire. From this moment onward, an overt confrontation ensued between the two parties, resulting in the church's condemnation of the regime's corrupt practices. During this period, there was

an alternating pattern of state repressive measures and a quest for support from the missions during times of crisis, which threatened the regime's legitimacy.
Secondly, the enterprises also experienced vicissitudes under this new regime. The financial corporations represented the enduring influence of colonial power, and Mobutu sought to disengage from the state-enterprise scheme that had been established during the colonial period. This shift in policy gave rise to a series of measures, including Nationalisation, Zairinization, and Radicalization, which, however, proved to be both ambivalent and evanescent in nature. The collapse of the economy ultimately compelled Mobutu to recalibrate his financial policies and accede to the austerity measures imposed, primarily, by the IMF. According to Lumumba-Kasongo (1992, 46), Belgium was a guarantor of the state in the same way as the IMF was. Moreover, it can be argued that the interests of the former Belgian colonial state endured through the survival of financial groups, as evidenced by the agreement of the dissolution of *Union Minière* in Gécamines, which enabled the Belgian state to continue generating revenues.

Accordingly, Clapham ([1996] 2009, 24-25) argues that the form of control in colonial economic affairs that was established in the late 19th century - imposing structures of economic production, systems of government, and cultural changes in language and education - was not completely eradicated by the time of independence. Instead, the heightened external control exerted since the 1980s, through economic and political conditionality, signified a reversion to pre-existing conditions of subjugation. This period had seen African governments endeavor to leverage their political independence to establish autonomous structures that, though often economically inefficient and politically undemocratic, as in the case of the Zaire, were nevertheless distinct from external control.

It can thus be concluded that the analysis of the interdependent alliance between the state, the missionary structure, and the complex enterprise architecture revealed some points of conveyance as well as contradiction and divergence. Nevertheless, it is evident that the missions and enterprises contributed, both intentionally and unintentionally, to the shaping and articulation of an African consciousness in the period leading up to independence. The resilience demonstrated by these entities enabled them to endure the crises and conflicts that afflicted the Congo during the First Republic years, as well as the subsequent attempts to centralize power under the Zairian regime. Indeed, as Gann (2015, 222) stated, "*for better or for worse, the Belgian experience shaped modern Zaire. The colonial legacy will be harder to extirpate than the decolonizes ever imagined*".

Indeed, it remains regrettably difficult to ascertain whether the state-missions-enterprises bloc, with their unique level of encroachment into the territory and into the daily life of a Congolese citizen, may have inadvertently hindered the emergence of a more cohesive national identity, one transcending tribal and ethnic logics, which have largely shaped the establishment of the first political parties.

Lastly, I would like to conclude with a popular testimony to recreate, through the art form of folkloristic songs, scenarios and feelings of oppression of the time. Indeed, opposition to colonialism manifested also through the mediation of popular art forms, including folk music. Despite their inability to serve as historical evidence, oral traditions have the capacity to transform historical reality into artistic expression, offering a vivid reconstruction of the past. Thus, the following song, symbol of indignation toward European settlers, was composed to promote the African National Congress program in Northern Rhodesia. It embodies the injustices suffered on the basis of racial, economic, and cultural discrimination.

Tsiku lina ndinaima pa mseu
Ndinaona vimagalimoto zim zim
Ndipo nditayangana nkatimo
Ndinaona nkope psupsu oh.
vimabunu vimabunu
Ndipo nditayangana mbuyomo
Ndinaona njinga you you oh.
sanka
Refrain
Tipatseni, tipatseni
Magalimoto nafe tipatseni
Tipatseni. tipatseni dziko
lattu weni tipatseni

Ndinaima ndi kuganizaganiza
Cifukwa ninji wina njinga
wina galimoto

Ndinaona kuti nyumba ija
Ya malamulo a azungu
Oh. yatipatso masauso
Lero tauka tapeza nzeru
Zonse akucita tiziona ona ona
Oh. Africa wauka

One day, I stood by the road side.
I saw cars passing by.
As I looked inside the cars
I saw only white faces in them.
These were European settlers.
Following the cars were cyclists with black faces.
Refrain
They were poor Africans.
The Africans say,
Give us, give us cars too,
Give us, give us our land
That we may rule ourselves.

I stood still but thinking
How and why it is that white faces
Travel by car while black faces
travel by cycle.

At last I found out that it was that house,
The Parliamentary House that is composed of Europeans,
In other words, because this country is ruled by
White faces, these white faces do not want
Anything good for black faces.

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