

The political life of the dead Lumumba: Cold War histories and the Congolese student left

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A dead Lumumba has become infinitely more powerful than a live Lumumba. (Jawaharlal Nehru¹)

The dead Lumumba ceased to be a person and became Africa in its entirety ... [I]n him the whole continent died and was resurrected. (Sartre 1963: xliv)

The ‘Global Sixties’, as one historian of that decade recently suggested, began in February 1961 when the news of Patrice Lumumba’s assassination triggered a wave of protests around the world (Slobodian 2012: 14).² Belgium and the United States had actively supported the anti-constitutional manoeuvres that had overthrown Lumumba’s government in September 1960, less than three months into his tenure as Congo’s first prime minister. Lumumba’s nationalist orientation had clashed with Belgian projects of continuing influence in Central Africa. His appeal to the Soviet Union when the United Nations had seemed unwilling to help him militarily defeat the secessionist regime of Moïse Tshombe in the mineral-rich Katanga Province had alienated Eisenhower. Despite the fallen prime minister’s placement under house arrest, the extent of his popular support continued to worry Washington and Brussels. On 17 January 1961, external pressure convinced Congolese authorities to transfer their cumbersome prisoner and two of his allies to Tshombe’s stronghold. Only hours after Lumumba and his comrades landed in Elisabethville, the secessionist leader ordered their assassination.³ Lumumba’s dreams of a truly independent Congo and a fully decolonized Africa had violently crashed against the Cold War’s hard realities. When Katanga’s authorities finally publicized the news of the assassination a few weeks after the fact, the uproar that erupted simultaneously in Harlem, Paris, Cairo, Jakarta and countless other cities marked the introduction of a new era of global prominence for Third World politics. Many scholars have come to see Lumumba’s tragic end as symbolizing the intrusion of superpower rivalries in African decolonization (a foundational analysis is Sartre 1963; more recent examples include Iandolo 2014; Irwin 2015; Mazov

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¹Cited in ‘Nehru sees turning point’, *New York Times*, 18 February 1961, p. 3.

²For a similar argument by two historians of ‘the long black Sixties’, see West and Martin (2009: 23–4).

³Recent studies, based mostly on American, Belgian, British and UN archives, have brought to light important clarifications on the various machinations, assassination plots and chains of responsibility that led to Lumumba’s political and physical elimination (see De Witte 2001; De Vos *et al.* 2005; Gerard and Kuklick 2015; Williams 2014).

2010; Namikas 2013; Schmidt 2013: 57–70; Von Eschen 2013; Weissman 2014; Westad 2007: 137–40).⁴

The Congo crisis rattled anti-colonial militants in Algeria, Angola and Egypt, rulers of newly independent nations in West and East Africa, non-aligned luminaries in Asia, internationalist revolutionaries in Latin America, civil rights activists in North America, blacks intellectuals in the Caribbean, and students and youths on all continents (Bjerk 2015: 9–11; Bouwer 2010: 131–90; Byrne 2016: 86–97; Gleijeses 2002: 77–8; Hickner 2011: 249–333; Mazov 2010: 142–7; Nzongola-Ntalaja 2014: 134; O'Malley 2015; Nkrumah 1967; Spivak 2013: 224–5; Wamba 1999: 194–6; Zeilig 2015: 132–3). At the time, the pro-communist International Union of Students (IUS) claimed that millions of young protesters around the world had taken to the streets when learning of Lumumba's assassination.⁵ Decades later, one participant in the heated demonstration against the Belgian embassy in Prague recalled the students' outcry at Lumumba's murder as a unique moment of authenticity and a brief suspension in the dull chain of the Czechoslovakian Communist Party's mandatory protests.⁶ These affective responses to Lumumba's martyrdom indicate a transnational 'democratic and oppositional imagination' that had escaped 'the superpower struggle' of the era (Von Eschen 2013: 464). The global amplitude of the shared 'internationalist structure of feeling' that manifested itself around the dead Lumumba prefigured the reverberations of Che Guevara's assassination in 1967 (Prestholdt 2012).

Privileging the 'international discursive space' (see Dunn 2003: 61–104) and attending to Lumumba's global significance in the 1960s, many scholars of the Cold War and decolonization have failed to register the emotional responses to his assassination in Congo itself. After his death, Lumumba's newly minted heroic and tragic stature informed how people in Congo perceived him, themselves and the challenges of their divided country. Among the followers of dissident churches in Bas-Congo and Northern Katanga, ethnic patriots in his native

⁴Born in 1925 in the village of Onalua, in Central Congo, Lumumba moved to Stanleyville (today Kisangani) at the end of World War Two. While working for the postal service, he continued his education as a self-taught autodidact, established a family life, and became involved in multiple local associations. Accused of embezzlement, the young postal employee spent several months in prison in 1956 and 1957. He then moved to Leopoldville, soon becoming a prominent figure in the burgeoning political scene. His participation in the All-African People's Conference in Accra in December 1958 accelerated his political trajectory and radicalized his platform. Imprisoned again at the end of 1959 after a congress of his Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) marked by violent skirmishes with the colonial authorities, Lumumba played a key role in the Belgian–Congolese 'round-table conference' of January 1960, during which the Belgian government agreed to grant Congo its independence. Four months later, the MNC emerged as the winner of the first national elections in Congo and Lumumba received the charge of forming the first government of the future independent country. Recent biographies of Lumumba include Nzongola-Ntalaja (2014) and Zeilig (2015); the best accounts of Lumumba's early life remain Omasombo and Verhaegen (1998; 2005).

⁵The IUS listed, in the following order and maybe not exhaustively, the countries in which students had taken to the streets after hearing the news of Lumumba's death: Belgium, England, the United Arab Republic, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, France, China, the United States, Venezuela, West Germany, Sudan, Ghana, Morocco, Nigeria, Guinea, the Netherlands, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Italy, Czechoslovakia and the GDR. See 'Students firmly on side of Congo', *World Student News* 15 (2), 1961, p. 4.

⁶Interview with Rudolph Mrazek, Ann Arbor, 2 May 2013.

Sankuru, and popular painters and their clients in Lubumbashi and Kinshasa, Lumumba acquired a sacrificial and spiritual dimension that in turn encouraged religious readings of neocolonialism and the throes of independence (De Boeck and Plissart 2014: 109; Dibwe 1999; Eggers 2013; Fabian 1996; Halen and Riesz 1997; Jewsiewicki 1996; 1997; 1999; Omasombo 2004; Turner 2000). Yet, no other ‘remembering community’ (Jewsiewicki 1999) was as strongly marked by the political life of the dead Lumumba as Congolese students across the country and abroad. The assassination turned the students into self-proclaimed protectors of Congolese nationalism (see Biaya 2001: 56–9; Ndaywel 1998: 648–50). As a group, students also embraced the new opportunities of social, spatial and imaginary mobility afforded by decolonization. Focusing on them, this article recovers forms of engagement with Lumumba that were both transnational and grounded in the experience of Congolese actors.⁷

Students do not generally feature in either studies of Lumumba’s assassination or international and diplomatic histories of the Congo crisis, even when their authors are committed to emphasizing the ‘African dimensions of the cold war’ (Kent 2010: 2). The reduction of Congo to a battleground between foreign interveners, the structuring binary of strategy and ideology, and the rhetoric of influence at play in Cold War histories generate a hierarchy of visibility and importance that filters readings of Congolese actors’ presence in the archives and affects an understanding of their agency.⁸ Cold War historians have paid heed to a range of Congolese elected officials and high-ranking military figures involved in the assassination of Lumumba or in the armed rebellions that some of his supporters launched after 1963. However, their accounts have neglected other actors, specifically students, who also stood at the forefront of the political struggle at the beginning of the 1960s but whose relevance appeared less obvious when measured along the axis of Cold War influence. Yet Congolese students were a key constituency in the transnational community of sentiments expressed in the aftermath of Lumumba’s assassination. Making space for them in narratives of the Congo crisis and its repercussions offers an opportunity to bridge the de facto gap between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ in representations of the dead Lumumba. Students did not fit neatly into either of those categories. Aspiring cosmopolitans and African nationalists, willing travellers and political exiles, and self-proclaimed avant-garde and hopeful modernizers, students operated at the juncture of various geographies and ideologies, inhabiting spaces and imaginaries neither exclusively domestic nor international.

⁷Works on the diverse incarnations of the dead Lumumba in Congo reveal fascinating layers of memories that call to mind Russian nesting dolls – the local/ethnic, the regional and the urban/national. Scholars have not always explained the relationships among these different incarnations, and between them and the ‘global/universal’ representations of Lumumba (see, for example, Turner (2000: 15) on the opposition between the constructions of Lumumba as a figure of global anti-imperialism and his inscription in local memories among ethnic Tetelas). Nevertheless, historians of visibility have shown that it is possible to reconcile Lumumba’s multiple images as ‘global icon’, ‘black Christ’, ‘Congolese Moses’ and ‘Tetela ancestor’ (De Rezende 2012: 395; Jewsiewicki 1996).

⁸On the tensions around foreign influence in the historiography of the Congo crisis, see De Villers (2016: 49–83).

Listening for Patrice Lumumba's post-mortem resonances in Congo requires venturing outside the archives of Cold War interventions. This article capitalizes on Congolese student publications and memoirs, as well as recent interviews with participants in 1960s student politics. Gender is a significant filter in these interviews, and more generally in the posthumous trajectory of Lumumba (see Bouwer 2010; De Rezende 2012: 342–415; Hess 2012). The young Congolese men who dominated the field of student politics in the 1960s identified with Lumumba through an embodied process that associated masculinity with worldliness and the political. The mechanics of memory work is another distinctive aspect of the archive assembled for this article. The meaning of Lumumba's death was not fixed once and for all in February 1961. In the decades since, Congolese have reinterpreted the Congo crisis through later reconfigurations of the political struggle. In the 2000s, reconsidering the activism of the 1960s meant working through multiple layers of histories and making sense of lives lived through often challenging circumstances. Reflecting on their student years, interviewees opened up dialogues between past futures and present deadlock, between their former selves and new generations of educated youth, and across several decades of dictatorship, political violence, exile, renunciations, reconciliations, and dreams broken, mended and broken again.

In her study of reburials in post-socialist Eastern Europe, Katherine Verdery argues that the concreteness and materiality of dead bodies contribute to their ability to make the past present and to generate new meanings and cosmologies in contexts of political transformation (Verdery 1999). A week after his assassination, Belgian policemen working for the Katanga secessionist state destroyed Lumumba's corpse in a barrel of acid.⁹ Negotiated in the absence of a body and a grave, the political life of the dead Lumumba has nevertheless allowed for the making of connections across time and generations, as well as between different selves, the nation and the world.

Students and Congo's decolonization

Congolese students' devotion to Lumumba needs to be historicized. The figure of the student did not initially connote leftist nationalism in the Belgian Congo. Having notoriously resisted the institution of higher education for the Congolese for many years, in 1955 the colonizer finally authorized the opening of Lovanium, the first university in the Belgian Congo, with the expectation that university students could serve as Belgium's allies against the unreasonable demands of political 'agitators'. In the mind of Lovanium's architects, academic virtues such as respect for truth, critical faculty and awareness of the world's complexity would oppose and moderate political action (Tshimanga 2001b: 169). Three years after the opening of Lovanium, when its students joined labour activists in writing a petition regarding salary equality between blacks and whites, this vision seemed to suddenly collapse (Young 1965: 63; Mantels 2007: 258). Students threatened to

⁹These gruesome circumstances explain the strong 'spectral haunting' of Lumumba in post-colonial Belgian imaginations (see Augustijnen 2011 and the different contributions on Lumumba and Belgium in Halen and Riesz 1997).

turn Congo into a 'second Algeria' if their demands were not met. By alluding to a violent anti-colonial insurrection elsewhere on the continent, the students directly touched the core of Belgian anxieties. This was the most tense moment at Lovanium during the eventful couple of years that would lead to Congo's independence, but it was also a rather isolated occurrence. Many students still seemed willing to counter 'irrational' politicians such as Lumumba by parroting the 'good advice' that they had received from their Belgian professors.

As the prospect of a transition of power appeared on the horizon, students worried that politicians would appropriate the administrative and executive positions that the young educated elite considered their own preserve. In the words of a student publication in April 1960: 'Real patriotic politicians understand that their civic duty is to use university students' technical skills by letting them occupy the important positions for which their education has prepared them.'¹⁰ In primary and secondary schools, Belgian teachers used young students' aspirations to positions of power within a future independent Congolese technocracy to alienate them from anti-colonial leaders: 'Your politicians, Kasa-Vubu and Lumumba, demand independence because they are afraid of your generation. They accelerate the process only to prevent you from ousting them with your diplomas' (Sampassa 2003: 18). In Leopoldville, Catholic missionaries warned young children that with 'the communist' Lumumba their mothers would become the wives of all the men in their neighbourhoods.¹¹ As a former Catholic priest who completed a doctoral dissertation on Latin stylistics just a few years after independence recalled: 'In the Congolese government, there were only four university graduates ... And we used to say "Stupid like a Congolese minister" because these people had no notions of philosophy, economy, chemistry, physics, and they listened to some words as if they were coming down from heaven.'¹²

The colonial anti-political rhetoric struck a sensitive chord with some Congolese teenagers, but it also sometimes backfired and ignited further politicization. In interviews, many former student activists remembered becoming interested in anti-colonialism after becoming aware of their Belgian teachers' hidden agendas. Recalling how missionary teachers in 1959 used communism as an expletive to both condemn Lumumba and reprimand their own students, François Kandolo drew a parallel between the drama of Congo's independence and the tensions behind the walls of Catholic schools:

One day, I argued with a Father who excited the tribes against each other and said: 'You, the Baluba, you came here to Luluabourg, you occupy all the positions, and the *originaires* are left without anything.' The priest basically said that we the Balubas were foreigners. And I said: 'We are not foreigners, we are Congolese. Luluabourg is the Congo.' So, he threw me out of school and told me: 'You are a communist.' It was my first year in secondary school and I did not even know what communism meant.¹³

¹⁰'Politiciens contre universitaires?', *Présence Universitaire* 3, April 1960, p. 67.

¹¹Interview with Jacques Mangalaboyi, Lille, 3 June 2011; see also Dibwe (1999: 61).

¹²Interview with Augustin Awaka, Kinshasa, 17 August 2010.

¹³Interview with François Kandolo, Kinshasa, 12 October 2007. In 1959, the young Kandolo lived and studied in Western Kasai, where violent conflicts opposed 'indigenous' Lulua with 'immigrant' Baluba populations. Ten years later, while a student at Lovanium, Kandolo would lead the first major student movement opposed to President Mobutu's regime. In February

While Kandolo and other young teenagers questioned the discrepancies between the world views promoted by their colonial educators and the reality of the world they experienced outside the classroom, students at Lovanium organized their first significant protest. Held in front of the South African consulate in Leopoldville, in the days following the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960, the demonstration expressed a Pan-African and internationalist consciousness during a moment of nationalist struggle. As was the case in the ‘Algerian letter’ of 1958, students utilized international comparisons to articulate their position on Congolese politics. For the nation’s future elite, protesting in the streets of Leopoldville also constituted a form of education and enjoyment. As Nestor Mpeye, a participant in the protest, recalled: ‘It was quite amusing: they dispersed us with water cannons. It was a first for us.’¹⁴ Oswald Ndeshyo, who also protested against the apartheid regime, remembered that only a minority of the students at Lovanium who, like him, were ‘Lumumbist through and through’ attended the demonstration.¹⁵

Indeed, not all university students joined in the excitement of activism in the streets of Leopoldville. While most of their peers elsewhere on the continent less ambiguously flocked into ‘radical’ ranks during the unravelling of European empires in Africa (Chafer 2002: 117–42; Foster 2015; Nicholson 2015; Rice 2013; Schmidt 2007: 127–36), many Congolese students in 1960 sceptically frowned upon the ‘dirty’ work of populist and electoral politics. The absence of an established class of colonized intermediaries in Congo created unique openings for them. The gravity of the crisis of decolonization only reinforced the symbolic capital of education and encouraged students to embrace the conservative dispositions imagined by Lovanium’s creators. After the political neutralization of Lumumba in September 1960, General Mobutu appealed to a group of university students and recent graduates to replace ‘the failed politicians who had precipitated the country into the abyss’ (Monaville 2013: 255–66; Mutamba 2015; Willame 1990: 424–56). Presided over by Justin-Marie Bomboko, who five years earlier had been the first Congolese to be admitted to the Free University of Brussels, the Mobutu-sponsored students’ interim government, known as the General Commissioners’ Council, remained in power until the end of January 1961. Therefore, it bore direct responsibility for the persecution of Patrice Lumumba and the deadly decision to deport him to Katanga (see Omasombo 2001).

Lumumba’s passions

The dead Lumumba would remain a polarizing figure within Congolese society, but not on university campuses, where, in contrast to the actions of the General Commissioners’ Council in 1960 and 1961, his heroic stature progressively became undisputed. However, immediate responses to his death among students varied across the country. At a Jesuit school in Mbanza-Boma in Bas-Congo, the students rejoiced. Most of them supported President Kasa-Vubu’s Alliance

1992, he also served as one of the main organizers of the epic march that demanded an immediate democratic transition. Brutally repressed by Mobutu’s security forces, the march represented the regime’s total loss of popular legitimacy.

¹⁴Interview with Nestor Mpeye, Kinshasa, 6 April 2010.

¹⁵Interview with Oswald Ndeshyo, Kinshasa, 7 June 2010.

des Bakongo (ABAKO) and were sensitive to their missionary teachers' rabid anti-Lumumba sentiments: 'I still hear the cry of joy that burst out of the students. "Lumumba is dead!" We celebrated that news as a joyful event. This is awful. This is how politically unconscious we were.'¹⁶ In Kikwit, students at Saint-François Xavier, another Jesuit school, reacted in a radically different manner, adding a black patch to their uniforms as a sign of mourning. 'This was totally scandalous for the Fathers, who were anti-communists, but people in town applauded us.'¹⁷ For Anastase Nzeza, the student in Bas-Congo, his friendship with a young Belgian leftist, participation in university student activism and learning about politics and the world contributed to dispersing the anti-Lumumbist haze of his teenage years. In the case of Michel-Ange Mupapa, the student in Kikwit, the assassination of Lumumba served as a marker in a longer trajectory of political awakening and an eventual affiliation with communism during his studies in France later in the decade.¹⁸

Mourning strengthened the affective bonds that united future student activists such as Mupapa to Lumumba; and religious images associated with death and martyrdom were profoundly imprinted on this early post-mortem engagement with the former prime minister. The passion of Lumumba – the photographs that showed him mistreated by soldiers during his imprisonment, the last letter to his wife in which he stoically faced his probable tragic end, the stories that circulated about the gruesome circumstances of his assassination – generated passion for Lumumba. Young Congolese imagined personal connections with the deceased prime minister through their own experience of suffering, exclusion and injustice. Célestin Kabuya, a young teenager who lived in Elisabethville in 1961, but whose family hailed from Northern Katanga (and who was therefore perceived as belonging to the enemies of the secession of the southern part of the province), explained how his own experience of political repression created his affinity with Lumumba. 'I know one thing with certitude: my own adherence to the character – to the myth, I was going to say – of Lumumba is strongly anchored in a moment of resistance, because we were really persecuted.'¹⁹

Lumumba's suffering and death became personal milestones in the biographies of Congolese children who would become involved in student politics later in the decade (see Nzongola-Ntalaja 2014: 7–8). By recalling how their coming of age intersected with the martyrdom of Lumumba, student activists of the late 1960s were predisposed to relive the unfinished dreams of Congolese nationalism when they launched the first major opposition movement against Mobutu's presidency (Monaville 2012).

¹⁶Interview with Anastase Nzeza, Kinshasa, 10 October 2010.

¹⁷Interview with Michel-Ange Mupapa, Kinshasa, 11 July 2011.

¹⁸Like several other student leaders of the 1960s, Mupapa explained his politicization in part due to the influence of an older family member who was involved in anti-colonial party politics in the very late 1950s and early 1960s. On anti-colonial activism in Kikwit, see Weiss and Verhaegen (1963) and Weiss (1994).

¹⁹Interview with Célestin Kabuya, Kinshasa, 3 November 2009. Kabuya's family originated in Northern Katanga, the region of Jason Sendwe and his BALUBAKAT party, one of the allies of Lumumba's MNC. His father worked first at the uranium mine of Shinkolobwe and then at the copper mine of Kipushi, where the young Célestin attended primary school before joining the Benedictine Collège de la Karavia in Elisabethville. On Katanga's secession, see Kennes and Larmer (2016: 41–60).

The internationalization of political affects

The martyrdom of Lumumba also directly affected university students. The rupture that it created in their approach to politics emerged clearly during interviews with former students of that generation. Remembering how his peers at Lovanium before independence expressed contempt for the ‘parvenu and barely literate’ Lumumba, Nestor Mpeye’s interview took on a confessional tone:

It is probably now time to acknowledge some things from the past ... Lumumbism and Lumumba’s aura among students really came along after his assassination. Before that, not really ... Lumumba had to be killed, otherwise he would have shown his incapacity to govern ... After that, UGEC [the Congolese Student Union] embarked on a Lumumbist trajectory and took up the whole vocabulary of the time.²⁰

A clear shift appears regarding Lumumba’s influence on Congolese-educated youth after his death. Different motives played out in making Lumumba a nearly undisputed post-mortem tutelary figure for these students, while only a minority had supported him while he was alive. Students who had once looked down on his lack of formal education now admired his prose and the power of his words, as collections of his speeches, letters and essays appeared in journals and edited volumes or were released on records. More importantly, his martyrdom served as a revelation of the stakes of decolonization in Congo and radicalized scores of ‘moderates’. It became the mirror in which young Congolese saw the reflections of their own trials and projected their imagined connections between self and nation. The dead Lumumba became a more tractable uniting reference, attracting and radicalizing many who had once opposed him.

Lumumba’s disappearance instilled a sense of regret and missed opportunities, both collective and personal, among the students. Kalixte Mukendi Wa Nsanga, who a few years later would edit a clandestine Maoist student publication that claimed its inspiration from Lumumba, reflected on how he crossed paths with him in 1959 and 1960 at the time when he was studying at Lovanium:

Lumumba was available and not haughty. He was so much ahead of us, but I looked at him with the mentality of 1959. I was a child of Katanga, not very politically conscious and I did not see that Lumumba had a destiny.²¹

The shock of February 1961 was crucial for student politics on two accounts. First, it initiated a political *aggiornamento*, making the language of nationalism hegemonic on campuses and marginalizing more conservative voices. Second, the dead Lumumba facilitated real conversations and contacts, as well as imagined

²⁰Interview with Nestor Mpeye, Kinshasa, 10 April 2010.

²¹Interview with Kalixte Mukendi Wa Nsanga, Nouakchott, 20 May 2016. Before independence, Wa Nsanga had developed many relationships within nationalist circles in Leopoldville, but he also maintained connections with politicians from Katanga. At different times when Tshombe and other politicians from Elisabethville visited Leopoldville, Wa Nsanga, using his cousin’s Opel to drive them around town, encouraged them to strongly defend Katanga’s interests in their negotiations with Lumumba. In February 1961, when the same politicians from Katanga announced Lumumba’s death, Wa Nsanga was studying in Germany. He remembered hearing the news on the radio and feeling ‘instantly devastated’.

connections and processes of identification, between Congolese students and foreign activists. The global expression of empathy and outrage after the death of Lumumba transformed Congolese subjectivities and groomed many young Congolese to reorient their politics in line with the cosmopolitan left. The international protests captured the attention of Congolese students and strongly imprinted on their politics, visions of the world and visibility in the world. Congolese students in 1960 and 1961 prepared themselves to take on important responsibilities in their country at a moment when 'the Congo was an unsettled idea being pitched to a uniquely international audience' (Irwin 2015: 211). They experienced independence and sovereignty at a deeply personal level. Higher education had given them access to ideas and spaces that were incommensurate with the limitations that a colonial 'nervous state' obsessed with its own 'epidemiology of subversion' and the imperatives of ideological containment had imposed over several decades (see Hunt 2016). For students, the project of independence was equally nationalist and cosmopolitan, and the internationalization of the Congo crisis registered beyond the level of diplomacy and strategy.

In the early 1960s, with numerous fellowships being offered by the newly established embassies in Leopoldville, hundreds of young Congolese seized the opportunity to continue their education in foreign schools and universities.

The experience of living abroad often informed students' decisions to embrace Lumumba. The fact that students hailed from the different regions of the country explained why some of them thought that they had a special mission to defend national unity. The nationalist inclination was already palpable at Lovanium, but it developed even more abroad, when physical distance gave more shape to the nation. In 1966, Ernest Wamba, the editor of the Congolese student journal in the United States, reflected on this new generational affinity:

Students have learned the Congo's diversity and the necessity of a coherent nation. They were right when they believed that their generation, having found a way to communicate among its diverse members, could help the older generation of those who crucified Lumumba how to breathe the new air of unity. (Wamba 1966)

Belgium was the number one destination for young Congolese, and the country quickly emerged as a major scene in the student movement. Resentment towards life in their host country politicized Congolese students in the former metropole. In a survey conducted in 1963, which asked eighty-four Congolese students about their lives in Belgium, respondents complained about 'wicked right-wingers', 'old people's exaggerated curiosity', and the lack of freedom of speech (Hockins-Kadiebo 1964: 29). Students experienced racism in the streets and in the classroom. They worried about going out after a Congolese bar was attacked in Liège (Matala Mukadi 2000: 65–80). Some of them requested transfers to other European countries.²² Nestor Mpeye, who had left Lovanium for Liège in 1960, remembered the city as a 'Katangese fiefdom', where only students from the

²²This was the case for Daniel Gambembo, who would become a major theoretician of Mobutism in the 1970s. A student of philosophy at the Belgian University of Louvain in 1960, he relocated to Switzerland after having spent forty-eight hours at a police station in the aftermath of a fight with a quarrelsome and racist Belgian 'returnee' who provoked him and one of his friends in a café in Louvain. Interview with Daniel Gambembo, Kinshasa, 2 October 2010.

secessionist province received access to university housing and social services. The initial experience of discrimination marked the young student in mathematics and motivated his participation in the demonstration that followed the assassination of Lumumba in front of the unofficial embassy of Katanga in Brussels.²³

Images of Lumumba in the 1960s ‘had the power to mobilize and radicalize political actors; they catalyzed anger, anchored demonstrations and protests, and generated new political visualities’ (De Rezende 2012: 396). The news of Lumumba’s death certainly brought a great number of Congolese university students into the streets and led them towards organized politics. In the late 1950s, oppositional politics and the youth branches of anti-colonial political parties had been mostly the realm of unemployed youth and some high school students. Lumumba’s assassination, as a traumatic ‘eventful collective experience’ (see Scott 2014: 72), engendered a generational shift, and a new segment of Congolese youth, more educated and worldly, came to occupy the front rows of nationalist politics.

These evolutions emerged clearly through the figure of Paul-Henri Kabayidi, another student of Lovanium who had recently transferred to a Belgian university and who co-organized with a group of young Belgian socialists the demonstration in front of the Katangese embassy in February 1961.

While the first cohorts of Congolese university students had primarily come from rural Catholic seminaries, Kabayidi was a child of Leopoldville and a former *Bill*.²⁴ A young man by the name of Emmanuel Nzuzi was Kabayidi’s closest friend during his teenage years. Nzuzi had moved from Luluabourg to live with the Kabayidis in the colonial capital and the two teenagers shared the same bed. In 1958, Kabayidi went to Lovanium to begin his university education. Nzuzi, still a high school student, became involved in nationalist politics, first as the president of Union de la Jeunesse du Kongo (UJEKO), a platform of the youth branches of Congo’s political parties, and then as the leader of the youth section of Lumumba’s Mouvement National Congolais (MNC). Kabayidi sometimes helped his friend with the writing of statements and pamphlets for UJEKO and MNC’s youth league. Yet, he remained outside active politics and often disagreed with Nzuzi’s radical methods. In October 1959, Nzuzi was arrested and imprisoned together with Lumumba in the aftermath of a tumultuous political congress in Stanleyville. After independence, Nzuzi remained a devoted supporter of Lumumba, organizing illegal protests against the prime minister’s ‘neutralisation’ in September (Houart 1960: 95) and being arrested in October after orchestrating a machete attack against three members of the General Commissioners’ Council, including the Commissioner of Finance, Albert Ndele (CRISP 1961: 123; Kamitatu 1971: 74). A few days after Lumumba’s assassination, Leopoldville authorities transferred Nzuzi, along with five other nationalist militants, to Kasai, another secessionist province. The provincial authorities dealt with Nzuzi and his companions in the same way as Katanga had dealt with Lumumba – by murdering them within hours of their arrival (De Witte 2001:

²³Interview with Nestor Mpeye, Kinshasa, 10 April 2010.

²⁴The *Bills* (also called *Yankees*) were members of Leopoldville’s youth gangs who fashioned themselves after the cowboy figures of Hollywood films. On Kabayidi’s involvement with *Billism* and his views on the movement, see Gondola (2016: 89–90, 175–6).

324–30). When Kabayidi put together the first demonstration against the assassination of Lumumba in Belgium in February 1961, Nzuzi, of course, was on his mind. It was finally his turn to enter the world of political organizing. The event had the feel of a painful baton passing.²⁵

The dead Lumumba accelerated the politicization of young educated Congolese. He also connected young activists over racial, national and political divides.²⁶ A good example is the Lumumba Club (*Cercle d'Études Africaines 'Patrice Lumumba'*), created in Brussels just a few days after the news of the assassination, with the probable support of Belgian communists. In one month, the club had attracted 150 members, calling on the youth to continue Lumumba's work and help the 'great revolution that is breaking out everywhere in Africa'. The name of Lumumba served to symbolize 'Africa in struggle', to bring 'together our true comrades', and to unite European and African youth 'in the front line' of 'the march of history'.²⁷ A Rwandese student in Belgium explained why he joined:

Not so long ago many Africans, and I was one of them, still lived under the fatal hypnosis of colonialism and imperialism. Since the tragic death of Patrice Lumumba, all these illusions vanished and my eyes opened. I understood that from now on we can no longer rely on others to make a free Africa.²⁸

The student's Fanonian words announced the emerging popularity of the theme of alienation in postcolonial African politics (see Falola 2001: 3–55). The dead Lumumba, he implied, helped African students recognize and acknowledge an oppression to which they had been blind. At the same time, it universalized African trials and gathered 'throughout continents' the 'peoples in struggle for common ideals, to recover their ridiculed dignity!'²⁹

Union

After the coup against Lumumba in September 1960, political assassinations, intimidations, rapes, tortures and kidnapping depopulated nationalist ranks by making leaders disappear and by scaring away militants (Kamitatu 1971: 86–91).³⁰ Many moved to Stanleyville, where Antoine Gizenga, one of Lumumba's most prominent allies, proclaimed himself the head of state of a Popular

²⁵Interview with Paul-Henri Kabayidi, Kinshasa, 12 February 2011.

²⁶The Communist Party, a historically weak performer in electoral politics in Belgium, recorded a relative success at the legislative elections of March 1961, doubling, with 3.08 per cent of the voters, its previous results in 1958. For Roger Cosyns-Verhaegen, a prolific Belgian expert on 'communist subversion', that success was the result of the party's use of Lumumba's image: 'Patrice Lumumba's death allowed [the party to conduct] a vast campaign of emotional exploitation among sentimental progressives, while fallacious arguments were used to shade off memories of Congolese atrocities' (Cosyns-Verhaegen 1967: 166).

²⁷'Appel!', *Cercle d'Études Africaines 'Patrice Lumumba' Bulletin Intérieur* 1, March 1961, p. 2.

²⁸J. M., 'Pourquoi je suis devenu un membre actif du club P. Lumumba', *Cercle d'Études Africaines 'Patrice Lumumba' Bulletin Intérieur* 1, March 1961, p. 4.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰See also Dema (1962).

Republic of Congo. Increasingly drawn into Cold War geopolitics (Mazov 2007), Gizenga succeeded in sending several groups of young Congolese to the Eastern Bloc as students and trainees. In Leopoldville, however, nationalists were in total retreat, and some students were tempted to fill the void.

From 4 to 7 May 1961, a congress at Lovanium launched a new association that would serve the students' renewed ambition to contribute to the political process: the General Union of Congolese Students (UGEC). The union was the first association to gather both students in Congolese universities and the staggering number of Congolese who studied abroad (Mobe 2007; Tshimanga 2001a). Its foundation responded to what many considered the political and moral failure of the General Commissioners' Council (Willame 1968). Unlike the students who had participated in the 'neutralization' of Lumumba, many founding members of UGEC felt strong ideological connections with the dead prime minister. For them, his cosmopolitanism was key:

We felt attracted to the progressivism of Lumumba, Nkrumah, Padmore, and all the men who belonged to the revolutionary movements of the time. Most of the African intellectuals belonged to that movement: Cheikh Anta Diop, Edem Kodjo and all the students in the French Federation of African Students. We too, like most students who fought for the liberation of Africa, shared the same ideas – Lumumba's ideas. (Gérard Kamanda, quoted in Kalema 2011: 113)

The international context and their awareness that the world was looking at Congo motivated the students to invest in the political process. The founders of UGEC listed the Algerian, French, Turkish, Japanese, English and various Latin American student movements as sources of inspiration. In the meetings that they had attended abroad, Congolese students had felt 'at the centre of all the other delegations' attention' because of 'the tragic events that unfolded in the Congo' (Hockins-Kadiebo 1964: 2). Encounters with foreign student organizations had nurtured their desire to build a student movement in Congo that could make its voice heard. UGEC's first president, Henri Takizala, explained the international stakes of Congolese student activism in the closing speech of the inaugural congress: 'Prove to our African friends and to the entire world that you are definitively men of your times.' Moreover, he added: 'Do not forget that students throughout the entire world are looking at you. Do not disappoint the trust they put in you. Show also to our populations that, far from being bourgeois university students, you are on their side and share their sorrows and joys' (Hockins-Kadiebo 1964: 5).

The UGEC leadership reproduced the rhetoric of expertise and responsibility claimed by students in previous years.³¹ For a few months in 1961, the union even openly supported the government of Cyrille Adoula, a labour activist who had attained the position of prime minister thanks to the help of the United States. However, his inability to end Katanga's secession contributed to the growth of student discontent. On 8 December 1961, hundreds of Lovanium students marched in the streets of Leopoldville, 'chanting anti-Tshombe, anti-English, anti-French, anti-Portuguese, and anti-Youlou slogans'.³² The students

³¹On elitism as a limitation of UGEC, see Nzongola-Ntalaja (2002: 127–8).

³²'Xylophones et balafongs', *Présence Universitaire* 8, January 1962, p. 56.

claimed that they supported Adoula, as well as the United States and the United Nations, which had taken clear positions against the secession. However, after having broken windows at the French, British and Portuguese embassies, they marched to Adoula's residence to put pressure on him in person. By the end of 1961, student support for the regime was clearly taking on more menacing and antagonistic tones.

The arrest of Gizenga in January 1962 and his banishment to the island prison of Bula-Mbemba, as well as renewed exactions against nationalist activists in Leopoldville, gave students' critiques of Adoula another push. UGEC expressed its support for a series of strikes in protest about salaries (Gassana 1982: 85–8) and student representatives at Lovanium began to denounce Adoula's dependence on the United States.³³ Accusations of incompetence and corruption replaced the respectful tone student leaders had used to address the government. While Lumumba had been criticized for some of his actions during the Congo crisis, the mistakes of the politicians who ruled the country after him only added to his growing aura.

The shift in students' political sensibilities in the aftermath of Lumumba's assassination was reflected in everyday interactions on campuses. At Lovanium, an institution that was waiting to be decolonized on several levels (see Monaville 2012), students did not join the underground Marxist reading groups that started to appear on campus en masse, and not all explicitly supported the radicalization of UGEC and other student associations. Yet, they used the language of left-wing activism to challenge the Belgian Catholic middle-class values upon which Lovanium had been built. One article in the university's newspaper, *Échos de Lovanium*, complained about the lack of restraint of students and their inability to behave like an elite when watching movies at Lovanium's *ciné-forum*. The author of the article expressed disbelief at the loud reactions of students in the audience, the clapping or booing of political figures during the news section, the 'shameless moans' in response to an embrace in a movie, the laughs 'when a woman is beaten up or molested on the screen' or when an actor has just been shot down. Finally, the author asked, 'Why rant and rave at the images by shouting: "Dirty priest," "What an old shit," "Putain," "Imperialist," etc.?'³⁴ As these cries and insults reveal, Lovanium's subculture had evolved by 1962 to turn a loaded political reference – *imperialist* – into a household word, and to make nationalism into a marker of student defiance and anti-conformist identity next to male chauvinism and anti-clericalism. A couple of years after independence, a combination of aggressive masculinity and radical politics permeated Lovanium's subculture and dialectic.

Revolutionary intellectual nationalism

This new radicalism materialized in the streets of Leopoldville in January 1963 when students protested once again against Western interventions in favour of

³³See, for example, I. R. A., 'Quitte ou double' and 'Editorial', *Échos de Lovanium*, April 1962, pp. 1, 5, 7.

³⁴Cléo Tshibangu, 'Lettre ouverte à M. le Président des Étudiants de Lovanium', *Échos de Lovanium*, April 1962, p. 6.

Katanga. The local section of UGEC in the capital city, led by Joseph Kabemba, Serge Kalonji and André Ilunga, organized a demonstration that specifically targeted the British embassy, located downtown inside the building of Barclays Bank. Forcing their way into the building and on to the floor occupied by the embassy, protesters broke windows and threw whatever they could grab out on to the street: piles of papers, chairs and other furniture, films and movie cameras.³⁵ The memorandum released after the attack betrayed the more combative tone sought by UGEC's grass roots: 'From now on, the English must know that they will find in front of their barbarous path, young people committed to relentlessly fight them, with all the ardor and the dynamism of youth' (Kabemba 1998: 72–4).³⁶

A good indicator of the left's intellectual dominance at Lovanium in the years that followed Lumumba's assassination can be found in the increasingly revolutionary rhetoric of the Catholic student journal *Présence Universitaire*.³⁷ The journal started publishing articles that called for students to liberate themselves from all forms of cultural subjugation. In 1963, one article on African intellectuals asked Lovanium students to immerse themselves in African culture, be in permanent contact with the people, and adopt revolutionary intellectual nationalism as their ideology. For the author of the article, this meant liberation from the colonized mind, but also participation in a revolution that would sweep away all the politicians who did not live up to the expectations of African nationalism.³⁸

Some students assuaged concerns about their growing reputation as radicals. At a seminar organized in Brussels in February 1963, a UGEC representative responded to the critiques of some of their Belgian peers: Congolese students' interest in communism was purely tactical and they only sought to 'elaborate a singular doctrine that could be applied to their specific situation by drawing useful elements from each system, East and West'. He added: 'Those who accuse us of being Lumumbist do not know what we put in this term.' Noting that many Belgians associated the name of Lumumba with the 'white exodus' from Congo in July 1960, he wanted to reassure them that, for Congolese students, it mostly meant 'national unity and anti-tribalism' (COSEC 1963: 5). These professions of moderation from UGEC's Belgian section ran against the impulses of many of the movement's activists. In August 1963, a much more aggressive tone informed the second general congress of UGEC, organized in Leopoldville. Delegates travelled from Western and Eastern Europe, North America, and

³⁵'Congo students sack embassy', *The Daily Reporter*, 15 January 1963, p. 3.

³⁶Two years later, after Southern Rhodesia's United Declaration of Independence, Leopoldville students returned again to protest in front of the British embassy, before directing themselves towards the Ghanaian and Ethiopian diplomatic representations to ask for 'guns to go fight in the South'. Commenting on the event, a student publication explicitly celebrated the Lumumbist inspiration for this type of protest, writing that 'the Congolese youth answered the late Patrice Lumumba's call to make the Congo the standard bearer of African liberation' ('Dans la nation', *La Voix des Étudiants Congolais* 5 (3), December 1965, pp. 3–4).

³⁷*Présence Universitaire* was created in 1959 by students affiliated with the Catholic group *Pax Romana*. Congolese and Belgian professors, notably Benoît Verhaegen, also regularly wrote in the journal. The tone of the articles was often academic, but many contributions dealt with student politics, both in general terms and with regard to particular issues and struggles on the campus (see Ndaywel 1992).

³⁸C. M., 'Le rôle national de l'esprit universitaire africaine', *Présence Universitaire* 11, January 1963, pp. 11–16.

from the newly created section in Elisabethville, which had been established directly after the end of the secession. Labour organizers and politicians, as well as foreign diplomats and visitors, attended.

An anecdote illustrates the willingness of UGEC to break away from the discourse of expertise and influence and to use the congress as a moment of rupture. Albert Ndele, a former minister in the student government put in place by Mobutu in September 1960 who had become the governor of the Central Bank, organized a dinner at the city's most expensive restaurant, *La Devinière*. Ndele had invited all the participants of the congress to attend, paying in advance for the preparation of a large buffet, and even organizing transportation between Cultrana Hall, where the congress was being held, and *La Devinière*. In a deliberate attempt to create a scandal, UGEC leaders unilaterally decided that no one would attend Ndele's dinner and his buses departed with not one delegate on board. The reason for the congress organizers' rejection of the invitation was that 'Mister the Governor had made students feel ashamed of his management of the country' (Kabemba 1998: 93).

The charge against Ndele was part of a broader position taken by UGEC during the congress. One of the most noteworthy statements made at the congress was a 'motion stigmatizing the political action' of the General Commissioners' Council.³⁹ According to the motion, the 'student-ministers' had participated in an illegal government that had worsened the Congo crisis, served the interests of foreign powers, and were 'partly responsible' for the assassination of Lumumba. The commissioners had discredited the entirety of Congolese students and youth, and UGEC felt obliged to finally 'denounce, in front of the national and international opinions, their ill-fated action' and to 'invite Congolese youth and more specifically the students not to imitate their example'.⁴⁰

The second congress reiterated UGEC's *raison d'être* as the defender of Congolese national unity and the link between scattered Congolese students around the world. Yet, several of the final motions and statements adopted in 1963 testified to the shift in leadership and militancy among UGEC's ranks. The ideological stance of UGEC remained within the rather 'moderate' discourse of African socialism, but students also called for the eradication of 'alienation and exploitation'.⁴¹ They attacked South African apartheid and Portuguese colonialism as they had in the past, but they also criticized the United States. Nkanza-Dolomingu, a delegate of the North American branch of UGEC, shared his experience of racism at Princeton, and students denounced the Peace Corps programme as an imperialist enterprise. Criticizing Adoula for his reliance on US

³⁹Some members of the student government directly participated in the machinations that led to the former prime minister's assassination, but others were more subdued in their anti-Lumumbism. Accordingly, in the following years, student activists would discriminate in their treatment of the former commissioners. Ndele had been identified early on as part of the 'anti-nationalist' core and was the target of the assassination attempt organized by Emmanuel Nzuzi in September 1960 (see also Benot 1991: 169–70). Ndele also belonged to the so-called Binza group, the shadow cabinet of anti-Lumumbist politicians who frequently gathered around Mobutu, enjoyed privileged access to the US embassy, and was seen as the real centre of power in Leopoldville throughout the first half of the 1960s (Nzongola-Ntalaja 2002: 124–6).

⁴⁰'Le deuxième congrès des étudiants congolais tenu à Léopoldville du 4 au 11 août', *Remarques Congolaises* 5 (22), September 1963, p. 317.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 309.

support, they identified the American embassy as the main source of neocolonialism in Congo, and accused Kennedy's administration of transplanting its Latin American policies to Africa.⁴²

'All for the people and its revolution' became the union's new motto. Students criticized the politicians who had taken advantage of independence and betrayed Congolese workers. They called for the end of Gizenga's imprisonment and denounced 'the imperialists' occult forces that ... alienated Adoula's government'. Finally, they demanded an official commission to investigate the murder of Lumumba and condemn his assassins, the erection of a large monument to his memory, and his official proclamation as a national hero. The congress symbolized a new student identity, clearly anchored in the left and free from earlier student political expressions. While the student left remained a small but active minority on campuses, the congress demonstrated that its ideas and vocabularies had imposed themselves as the official voice of the student movement.⁴³ Praised by Sartre, Fanon, Malcolm X and Che Guevara, Lumumba lent himself perfectly to the radicalism of the new times.

Embodying the left

Zénon Mibamba, a student at the Plekhanov Institute of Rural Development in Moscow, presided over the ultimate session of the UGEC congress in 1963.⁴⁴ Asked in 2010 why conservative students had not opposed the most radical resolutions of the congress, Mibamba replied: 'You know, the 1960s was a time when people talked about the revolution, the left, not like today when everybody wants to become bourgeois and build a house for themselves.'⁴⁵

Despite Mobutu's proclamation of Lumumba as a national hero in 1966, Laurent-Désiré Kabila's promises of a Lumumbist restoration in 1997, and Joseph Kabila's erection of a Lumumba monument in Kinshasa in 2002, the dead Lumumba has remained uncaptured to this day and institutional support

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁴³While the reference to Lumumba became a central element in the expression of student progressivism, its meaning was sometimes debated. The students' Lumumbism was clearly understood as a critique of 'tribalism' and a defence of Congolese national unity, but its relation to more radical projects was not consensual, as a letter sent by a student in Elisabethville to the editor of the journal published by the US branch of UGEC in 1965 demonstrates. The letter noted the journal's contradictions: it denounced the Mulelist rebellions that claimed the legacy of Lumumba, but it published poems and letters by the dead prime minister in all its issues. For the editors, there was no contradiction and their position – calling for a reconciliation between the government and the rebels – was the true Lumumbist response to the conflict ('Rebelle ou Lumumbiste?', *La Voix des Étudiants Congolais* 5 (3), December 1965, p. 11; see also Bokamba 1966).

⁴⁴Denounced in the press as the instigator of a communist infiltration in the student movement, Mibamba's first intervention at the congress had been to request a clearly ironical one-minute silence in homage to Patrick Bouvier Kennedy, the US president's recently deceased premature child. Despite his clear anti-American tendencies, US agents approached Mibamba during the congress. They offered him a fellowship to study 'sovietology', promising to make him the future head of the Soviet studies department that they planned to open at the University of Lubumbashi. Interview with Zénon Mibamba, Kinshasa, 15 June 2010.

⁴⁵Interview with Zénon Mibamba, Kinshasa, 15 June 2010.

for his memory has never progressed past the superficial.⁴⁶ For some former students, the dead Lumumba, fixed in the heroic and pure posture of the martyr, offered a point of reference that helped them iron out biographies marked by ideological wear, political detours, and the contradictions inherent in the juxtaposition of different lifecycles.⁴⁷ It was not so much the case for Mibamba; more than most people, he had proved his commitment to the Congolese revolution. Part of the small group of students who attempted a concrete application of the radical rhetoric of UGEC, he joined exiled politicians in Brazzaville a few weeks after the congress. The successful revolution that had just overthrown the regime of President Youlou on the other side of the Congo River had turned Brazzaville into a safe haven for Lumumbist politicians newly convinced of the prospect of insurgent strategies. Mibamba spent the next several years between Brazzaville and the front lines of the rebellion in Congo. In October 1968, Mibamba was part of the group of five revolutionary militants who were forced by Brazzaville's authorities to return to Kinshasa (Leopoldville's new name after 1966). Within days of their return, soldiers tortured the most well-known person in this group, Pierre Mulele, dismembered parts of his body while he was still alive, and disposed of his corpse in the Congo River (Martens 1985: 331–3). Through his armed insurrection, Mulele had symbolized the revival of the Lumumbist struggle. A tract released by Congolese students in France expressed the connection poetically, seeing in Mulele's rebellion 'the dead Lumumba still rising himself like a giant in front of his enemies'.⁴⁸ Through his atrocious assassination, Mulele was transformed into another Christ-like figure of the Congolese left and reopened the wounds of Lumumba's martyrdom.

Mibamba survived the return to Kinshasa. However, he remained imprisoned for years – first in the dungeon of the secret police in Kinshasa, where Célestin Kabuya and other student activists from Lovanium found him in 1971; then at Mbula Mbemba, the famous prison island at the meeting point of the Atlantic Ocean and the Congo River; and finally at Belingo, one of the four 'penal colonies for dangerous exiled prisoners' established by the Belgians during the colonial period.⁴⁹ Zénon Mibamba could easily have died, forgotten, in any of these places of banishment and imprisonment; many of his former comrades thought

⁴⁶Outside student circles, Lumumbism has remained rather marginal in Congolese organized politics in the past few decades. After the democratic opening in 1990, several political parties claimed Lumumba's name and legacy, but none of them approached the electoral or political dominance of the MNC in 1960 (see Nyunda ya Rubango 1999; Turner 1997). In 2006, Antoine Gizenga's Parti Lumumbiste Unifié (PALU) entered President Joseph Kabila's ruling coalition, with the eighty-one-year-old Gizenga himself becoming the new prime minister. Yet, PALU's electoral basis has mostly been limited to Kwilu Province and some segments of Kinshasa's electorate. On the initial failure of PALU to unify the Lumumbist movement at the time of its creation in the mid-1960s, see Mabika (1996: 146–50).

⁴⁷Memories of Lumumba not only mediate personal biographies; they are also social. Mutual attachments to Lumumba and souvenirs of past camaraderie in the ranks of the left help maintain friendships, including those among former activists who might have otherwise drifted apart politically. On connections between friendship, Lumumbism and memories of youth activism, see Kisonga (2013: 23).

⁴⁸Fédération des Étudiants Africains en France, untitled tract, Strasbourg, January 1970, National Archives, Paris, 4-WZ-15035.

⁴⁹On the history of these penal colonies, see Hunt (2016: 167–206).

that this had indeed been the case. Yet, in 1973, he was freed, together with the group of students from Lovanium, as Mobutu's gesture of goodwill before his first visit to Mao's China. Freed, but not free, Mibamba had a difficult time finding employment, but friends from UGEC found him a position as a civil servant. In the aftermath of Mobutu's overthrow in 1997, Mibamba was included in Laurent-Désiré Kabila's transition parliament. Nonetheless, after the assassination of Kabila in 2001, the old guard of 1960s revolutionaries was quickly marginalized. Ten years later, Mibamba was still working in government, but very far from the luxurious palaces of the new regime. He did not own a car and he still lived in Masina, a district of Kinshasa close to the airport and kilometres away from the city centre, a place that the *Kinois* had nicknamed 'the People's Republic of China', not out of any particular political inclination but more in reference to the district's overpopulation. An ascetic man, whose goatee, baldness and half-laughing eyes called to mind photographs of Lenin, Mibamba expressed a strong loyalty to the commitments of his youth. Decades after UGEC's congress, his political opinions had not wavered much.

Patrice Lumumba changed Zénon Mibamba's life several times. In 1959, the latter was a young and promising accountant, working for Unilever in the plantation town of Astrida, in Eastern Congo. In his mid-twenties, he was happily married, owned a car, and had access to the facilities reserved for the company's white employees. Yet, as soon as he discovered Patrice Lumumba, he enthusiastically joined the MNC, using his car to spread propaganda, selling the party's member cards, distributing newspapers, and irremediably compromising his position with his employer. Two years later, after Lumumba's death, he quit his job at Unilever, joined the partisans of the assassinated prime minister in Stanleyville, accepted a scholarship from Pierre Mulele and left for Moscow, alone, without his wife or young son. He was now a university student, but also a revolutionary, and his later involvement with the armed struggle would not constitute a break from his militant activities in UGEC. Mibamba embodied a crucial moment of transition in the trajectory of the Congolese student movement: its final departure from the episode of the General Commissioners' Council, its participation in the emergence of a revolutionary and insurrectionary struggle, and the growing influence of socialism on the movement. In conducting these moves, Mibamba and his comrades also changed the (after)life of Patrice Lumumba.

Conclusion

There are no straight lines in the history of postcolonial Congo. Yet, the shock of Lumumba's assassination clearly helped inspire a turn towards the left in 1961 and in the years that followed. Largely unrecognized by Cold War histories, that political process was nonetheless also the by-product of the internationalization of the Congo crisis and proved central to the historical imagination of an entire generation of educated Congolese. The affective resonance of Lumumba's martyrdom on individual students and his ideological impact on their nascent union had a deep meaning at a time when contradictory forces fought over the direction that newly independent Congo would take. The dead Lumumba pushed young, educated Congolese to revisit the meaning of decolonization.

Independence changed the collective identity of Congolese students. The Belgian colonial state had abandoned its opposition to higher education in the early 1950s, premised on the conviction that the educated elite would counter-balance the influence of the activists who were starting to question the colonial status quo. Students based much of their legitimacy as actors in national politics on the rhetoric of elitism and the language of expertise, even when some of them opposed the conservative ideology laid out for them by the founders of Lovanium. What is revealed by paying close attention to the trajectory of Congo in the early 1960s, and to the complex relationship of students with Lumumba, is that the emergence of the student movement as a progressive force in Congolese politics, as a beacon of the left nationalist camp, was not a natural phenomenon. It might not have happened had Lumumba not been assassinated, and it always remained a fragile development. Tensions and oppositions within student ranks never disappeared. Yet, Lumumba's name and posthumous memory allowed the most radical elements to take control of the movement and to produce credible performances of unity that marginalized other factions. The power of Lumumba's eloquence, increased by the feelings of compassion and aspiration that he created for the students, turned him into a uniquely inspiring ally for these activists.⁵⁰

This article has argued that students' extroverted political imagination (see Bayart 1999; Hodgkinson and Melchiorre 2019, this issue) explains Lumumba's posthumous popularity in Congolese universities. Through their affiliation with the figure of Lumumba, young Congolese – both at home and among the Congolese student diaspora on both sides of the Cold War divide – could expect to garner support and attention from real and imagined allies around the world. Celebrations of Lumumba's memory played a central role in the political socialization of an entire generation of Congolese students. The international communion around Lumumba's name sometimes resulted from productive misunderstandings, as his globally iconic status was not commensurate with his more complex legacy in Congo. Nonetheless, Lumumba played a crucial role of transnational mediation throughout the 1960s and made possible the circulation of new political repertoires among young Congolese.

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⁵⁰Students engaged mostly with Lumumba's 'public transcript' and as a sort of secularized religious figure, but they were certainly aware of the spiritual reception of the dead prime minister among other Congolese constituencies. On the complex interaction between the political, the therapeutic and the occult in Eastern Congo's Kitawala communities' understanding of the *puissance* of Lumumba, see Eggers (2013).

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Abstract

This article examines Patrice Lumumba's afterlife among Congolese students in the 1960s. Mobilizing oral histories, it also interrogates the stakes of remembering Lumumba at different moments in Congo's postcolonial history. It shows how Lumumba's assassination became a collective and personal landmark in the biographies of a generation of student activists and clearly helped facilitate a turn towards the left in 1961 and in the years that followed. Overlooked by Cold War histories, this political process was nonetheless also a by-product of the internationalization of the Congo crisis and proved central to the historical imagination of a generation of educated Congolese. The dead Lumumba pushed young educated Congolese to revisit the meaning of decolonization. The article argues that the students' extroverted political imagination was an important explanation for Lumumba's posthumous popularity in Congolese universities. Through their affiliation with the figure of Lumumba, young Congolese could expect to receive support and attention from real and imagined allies around the world. The international communion around Lumumba's name was sometimes the result of productive misunderstandings; nonetheless, his legacy played a crucial role in transnational mediation throughout the 1960s and made possible the circulation of new political repertoires among Congolese students.

Résumé

Cet article examine l'après-vie de Patrice Lumumba au sein de la population étudiante congolaise des années 1960. Mobilisant des histoires orales, il interroge

également les enjeux de se souvenir de Lumumba à différents moments de l'histoire postcoloniale du Congo. Il montre comment l'assassinat de Lumumba est devenu un repère collectif et individuel dans les biographies d'une génération d'étudiants activistes et comment il a clairement aidé à faciliter un virage à droite en 1961 et dans les années qui suivirent. Occulté par les histoires de la guerre froide, ce processus politique était aussi néanmoins un produit de l'internationalisation de la crise congolaise et il s'est avéré être un élément central de l'imagination historique d'une génération de Congolais instruits. Le Lumumba mort a poussé de jeunes Congolais instruits à réexaminer le sens de la décolonisation. L'article soutient que l'imagination politique extravertie des étudiants était une explication importante à la popularité posthume de Lumumba dans les universités congolaises. À travers leur affiliation au personnage de Lumumba, les jeunes Congolais pouvaient espérer recevoir le soutien et l'attention d'alliés réels et imaginés du monde entier. La communion internationale autour du nom de Lumumba était parfois le résultat de malentendus productifs ; néanmoins, l'héritage qu'il a laissé a joué un rôle essentiel dans la médiation transnationale tout au long des années 1960 et permis à de nouveaux répertoires politiques de circuler parmi les étudiants congolais.