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POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (LEOPOLDVILLE)
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Introduction

In the period between 1945 and 1955, when gradually a series of more or less timid steps towards social integration, removal of legislative racial discrimination, freedom of association, Congolese participation in the consultative councils, etc. were made, nobody seemed to think that emancipation in the Congo would ever follow a rapid pace. Numerous associations, with varied aims and functions, in the context of which new claimant leadership developed, sprang up everywhere, but political opinions and claims did not come into the open until 1956, when successively the "Conscience Africaine" manifesto (30 June) and the Counter Manifesto by Abako (23 August) were made public. Although in the Counter Manifesto the claim for immediate initiation of the emancipation process had been made, the rhythm of political growth apparently remained slow. In 1957, the colonial administration introduced a series of fundamental administrative and political reforms relating to the governmental, provincial, and territorial councils, and to the status of cities and native districts ("circonscriptions indigènes"). In December 1957, municipal elections were organized in the three major cities (Leopoldville, Elisabethville, Jadotville); they revealed, in general, the importance of tribally oriented movements, and in particular, the overwhelming influence and strength of the well-organized Abako party in Leopoldville (133 seats in 170). Organized political activity began in 1958.

Several parties, such as M.N.C., Cerea, P.N.C. (to become M.P.N.C. in 1959), Upeco, were founded. From Belgium, a special working committee was sent to the Congo to define future governmental policy and to determine the aspirations of the Congolese populations and their leaders. In view of the activities of this committee, a group of sixteen Congolese leaders submitted a memorandum claiming the democratization of Congolese institutions, decolonization, and the establishment of a time-table. By the end of the year, the Belgian working committee had recommended the creation of an autonomous Congo state, provided with a democratic system that would respect African values; and three Congolese leaders had participated in the Pan-African Conference at Accra, where rapid independence for the entire African continent was urged. The year 1959 was to be marked by a swift succession of politically meaningful events. Declarations by the Belgian king and government (13 January), in which, in somewhat contradictory wordings, the right to independence for the Congolese was recognized within the framework of a unitary state. Violent mass movements in Leopoldville Province (Leopoldville, Matadi, Thysville, Lukula, Kitona) and Oriental Province (Stanleyville); mushroom growth of a great many political movements, some of which were short-lived, while others merged or split into new parties; serious regional difficulties in inter-tribal relations; antagonisms between new leaders or between new and traditional leaders; congresses and conventions at which diametrically opposed points of view became manifest with regard to the future form of government and the structure of the state. This fantastic political awakening occurred in a country, whose structures, institutions and problems had, by 1959, become increasingly complex.

Social and Cultural Environment

To grasp some of the peculiarities of Congolese parties, and the general trend of political developments, it is necessary to give full consideration to some aspects of the social and cultural environment in which they grew.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

The country was inhabited by a large number of culturally and linguistically different peoples, all of whom had maintained a strong attachment to their respective cultural values; due to the colonial impact, they had become increasingly conscious about their similarities and differences. These differences were apparent in the urban as well as in the rural areas. In urban areas, they had become crystalized in the creation of a vast number of tribally and culturally oriented associations, each with its own special interests and goals; but these might at least coincide in matters of anti-colonialism and achievement of independence or overlap in the face of the overwhelming strength of particular associations. In the rural areas, these differences were, of course, apparent in all the spheres of social life; but local factors – such as prolonged separation in different administrative units of homogeneous or fairly similar populations, or numerical weakness of certain groups, or common or divergent acculturative experiences – had, in many cases, given new direction and new scope to these differences. There were, of course, also many cultural and linguistic similarities between various peoples, which were due to multiple historical causes. In different degrees, the peoples concerned were conscious of this and tended to give it political meaning. There were not only many different peoples, but most of them were numerically very weak (the average numerical strength of homogeneous populations lay between 20,000 and 350,000). Some of the larger recognizable populations – such as the Mongo, Baluba, Alunda, Amashi, or Banande – were subdivided into a great number of cultural subunits, politically and territorially segmented, administratively separated. The only exceptions were the Bakongo, who, although they were lacking any kind of centralized political system and were subdivided into many cultural subunits, had developed a strong sense of cohesion and homogeneity¹. Although these many populations had been exposed to a fairly uniform colonial impact, the local experiences resulting from the contact situation were nevertheless widely divergent. In some cases, for example, the demands by the colonial administration for land and labor had been much more exacting than in others; in some areas, direct colonial interference with custom had been much more direct than in others; in some regions the centralizing administrative technique, combined with the imposition of various pseudo chiefs, had been felt much more profoundly than in others; agricultural and other economic innovations were much more beneficent to certain peoples than to others, etc... Differential reactions to the impact of evangelization and white settlement had also produced wide-sweeping difference.

The consequences of all this for the development of political parties were:

- given the multiplicity of territorially widely distant and culturally divergent, numerically weak and politically fragmented societies, none of which had developed the sense of belonging to a Congo-nation, the chances for multiple conflicting political alignments were great;

¹ The pride they took in recapturing the values attached to the fifteenth century Kongo kingdom, and to their linguistic homogeneity, and the integrative action of the Kimbangist prophetic movement, contributed very heavily to this.

- given the persistence of values attached to remote historical relationships between different, but culturally and linguistically related societies, the chances for supra-tribal alignments, especially between ethnic minorities, were many;
- given the persistence of traditional cleavages between particular societies – even though these societies might be remotely related – the chances for sharp local political antagonisms were numerous;
- given the locally different degrees of frustration, distrust and confusion, caused by the colonial impact, and the local successes of extremist prophetic movements, some societies had over a number of years developed a more radical and xenophobic outlook than others.

Partitions and Amalgamations

The Congo, with its highly centralized governmental system, was administratively subdivided into six provinces (four before 1934; six from 1934 on), 24 districts, 132 “territoires,” 925 “circonscriptions indigènes” (native districts) of two types:

- “secteurs:” non-customary rural entities grouping a number of related or unrelated segments of one or several stateless societies placed under an administrative chief;
- “chefferies:” in administrative thinking, customary rural entities grouping related and politically integrated segments of a tribe; in fact, in several instances, as artificial creations as the “secteurs”).

The urban populations were organized into “cités indigènes” (small urban centers), “centres extra coutumiers” (larger urban centers), part of which had become, since the reforms of 1957, “communes” (boroughs) that were federated into the “ville” (city). In 1959, there were seven such “villes,” subdivided into 32 boroughs.

This administrative set-up was the result of many transformations, reorganizations, local regroupings and resettlements, amalgamations of distinct social and political entities, modifications in boundaries. These administrative reorganizations had succeeded one another from 1891 on until the final reform of 1957. The general trend apparent was the systematic reduction of the number of “chefferies indigènes,” i.e., the amalgamation into larger wholes (“secteurs”) of entities that, at one time or another in colonial history, had been administratively autonomous. On the other hand, from 1934 on, there was remarkable stability in the number of provinces, but occasionally some thought was given to increasing their number; furthermore, there was a slight, but steady increase in the number of “territoires” and “districts.” These successive administrative regroupings, undertaken on the basis of scanty knowledge about the nature and character of traditional social and political structures, were basically contradictory with historical, linguistic, and cultural realities; in the light of the people’s persistent attachment to traditional social and political groupings – and the claims to rights in land that were closely linked with them – they greatly contributed to the intricacy of the total social picture in the Congo and the spread of feelings of frustration and competition.

These problems were enhanced by the fact that the continual creation of new “native districts” necessitated the nomination of new “chiefs” and “notables,” few of whom had a traditional basis for their power and most of whom were only accepted by a segment of the administratively amalgamated populations. In light of the rapid emancipation that began to spread in 1959, the problems relating to this administrative set-up were all the greater in that all key positions in the administrative hierarchy

– above the levels of native district, borough, “cité,” and “centre-extracoutumier” – were held by Belgian officials.

Urbanization

About twenty four percent of the Congolese population was living in urban areas (cities and smaller towns, mining compounds, small commercial and administrative centers, European plantations). In these urban areas – some of which like Leopoldville, drew their populations from all over the Congo, although certain ethnic or regional groups had a much stronger numerical representation than others – the cultural and social distinctions between different sections of the population were sharply drawn. They had been crystalized in the prodigious development of various tribally and inter-tribally oriented associations, with multiple functions. In the older parts of the cities these cultural differences had greatly influenced the spatial distribution and territorial compactness of particular groups of tribesmen. The growth of political aspirations, and the results of the first communal elections (1957) in three major cities contributed to a greater awareness of the strength that could be derived from strong tribally-oriented alignments; furthermore, new solidarities between culturally more or less similar townsmen belonging to the urban tribal minorities found a fertile basis in these experiences. Many social distinctions had developed, which cut across the traditional cultural differences. The number of jobless was steadily increasing because of the continued influx of immigrants and the general deterioration of the economy. A middle-class of self-employed Congolese had developed; membership in trade unions and cooperatives had rapidly risen since 1957; ideological differences had been directly introduced among certain sections of the population by the major Belgian political parties. Since World War II, in centers all over the Congo, a new social category of “*evolués*”² had developed; these “*evolués*” were drawn from practically all Congolese tribes, although certain tribes and regions produced a much greater proportion of new elites, because of greater local educational and economic opportunities. These milieu of “*evolués*” rapidly organized themselves; they voiced their dissatisfaction with social and economic inequalities; their claims were gradually tinged with political aspirations. The rising status, achievements, and claims of these new elites caused concern and distrust, not only among the milieu of white settlers and administrators, but also among certain groups of the traditional elite (chiefs, traditional and administrative; other traditional authorities). Very few of these new elites had received any higher form of college and university training, simply because of the prolonged inexistence of these educational levels. Very few had been trained in matters of organizational responsibilities, outside the experiences they acquired through leadership in the various associations they created and those they derived from their positions in the lower administrative levels.

Many other factors added to the complexity of the total picture. We can only mention here such factors as the great regional demographical differences; the regional unevenness in economic growth; the general financial deterioration; the climate of distrust between Congolese and Europeans in the Congo, and between Belgians in the Congo and at home; the crisis in the Belgian administrative machinery itself; the competition between Belgian political parties.

² Autochthonous people who had become Europeanized through education and assimilation and often held clerical and other skilled positions.

Before the Political Parties: The Associations

Political parties in the Congo were late to develop. Abako grew into a political party in 1956; the Union Congolaise was created in 1957 by a Belgian lawyer; half a dozen parties emerged in 1958 (including M.N.C., Cerea, and one of the major constituents of P.N.P.). A great number – ultimately about 120 – were to follow between 1959 and 1960. A variety of reasons could account for this tardy growth. One major reason is related to the general orientation of colonial policy, which concentrated on the development of local government, economic infrastructure, and social achievements as the *sine qua non* on which ultimately new political organizations could arise. Another major reason can be found in the existing legislation. Ever since 1906, the principle of respect for local custom had been accepted, insofar as it did not prove to be contrary to public order or written law. The same precautions had been taken in 1919 (Convention de Saint-Germain-en-Laye) with regard to cultural liberties. Various decrees issued over a number of years allowing for the dissolution of “hierarchically organized” associations with “subversive activities. The vagueness of these formulas permitted to react administratively against any kind of association or movement that could arouse suspicion, i.e., that was deemed to be contrary to the security and public order in the colony, e.g., that contained ideas about political transformation. Yet, notwithstanding these limitations, a great number of associations of different type and structure, with highly diversified functions and goals, had arisen. Some were local, short-lived and rapidly put under administrative control; others managed to spread widely and to operate more or less secretly; still others were tolerated or admitted because they apparently did not present a threat to the security; others finally began to develop, after World War II, with the explicit support or tacit agreement of the colonial government.

The many associations that existed in the Congo can be grouped as follows:

- In the pre-colonial Congolese societies – whether they had or did not have a state-like system there existed a great number of associations, which performed a variety of social, political and religious functions, but were all based on elaborate initiations and restricted to specific societies. Some of these associations, like Bwami among the Balega and Babembe, Nkumi among the Atetela, Nkum among a great many of the Mango subunits, had such a large membership and were so broad in scope, that most social, political and religious functions came to be monopolized by them. Many of these associations had been prohibited and dissolved by the administration, because they were deemed to be secret, subversive, immoral, etc... Nevertheless, many of them managed to survive, recruiting their members and functioning more or less secretly. Few of them directly came to affect the urban milieu's. There are, however, exceptions such as the many associations of Azande origin (Northeastern Congo), which, by the end of World War I, had been introduced in urban centers like Leopoldville and Boma, and which had spread under different forms to the region of Lake Leopold II and to the Kasai Province. Well-organized and strongly coherent entities, in which congeniality and mutual solidarity were great, these associations often served as centers for organized, anti-acculturative movements, through which social disobedience could be expressed. What the local role of these traditional associations has been in giving mass support to certain political parties, is a matter that has yet to be clarified.
- New kinds of traditionalist associations and movements developed early. Some of them, like the Epikilipikili movement, launched in 1905 by a prophet of that name, centered around the alleged powers attributed to new medicines and charms, and were little, if any, inspired by the new

administrative patterns or religious ideas that had been introduced. Other movements, like Punga, followed an organizational pattern in which many new elements, particularly derived from the administrative hierarchy, were incorporated. Some were essentially peaceful in their action; others, like Anieto among the Babali or Munama among the Basoko (both in Oriental Province) led to violent activities. What is typical about them is that they developed in a particular tribal area – e.g., Epikilipikili and Punga respv. originated among the Atetela of Kasai Province and the Bakusu of Kivu Province – but rapidly spread among a variety of related and non-related tribes. Many managed to survive secretly, with ups and downs in the overtness of their activities. Some affected the smaller centers and mining compounds. Although they served various purposes, including magical immunity, they were nationalist in scope: based on the possession of medicines powerful enough to neutralize the white power, they predicted the end of white domination. They developed the idea of liberation of the group and organized resistance through the boycott of certain imported goods, or of certain imposed chiefs, or through the refusal to pay taxes or render certain services. These associations definitely introduced into some tribal areas the radical and xenophobe outlook that came to the open in later party ideologies.

- In 1921 and 1926 respv., two prophetic and syncretistic movements, which were to receive mass support, both in rural and urban areas, emerged in the Congo. The first one was established by Simon Kimbangu; it appealed essentially to the Bakongo people of the Lower Congo, but also exercised some influences elsewhere. This movement, which, after many vicissitudes, was finally to be recognized (end of 1959) as the Church of Jesus-Christ on Earth by Simon Kimbangu, played a major integrative role in Bakongo society; it provided a broad structural basis for the organization of the different Bakongo subunits, developed a sense of belonging and of pride in the local traditional language and culture. The second movement, called Kitawala, was introduced from Rhodesia by Mwana Leza. It first developed in urban areas of Katanga; by 1938, it had spread into the northern mining areas of Katanga; from there it reached into some tribal areas of Kivu and Equatorial Provinces, and affected the population of Stanleyville in Oriental Province. The movement had become particularly popular among a number of different, economically less advanced, politically less integrated and geographically more isolated forest populations. This movement, which contributed toward supratribal solidarities, undoubtedly contributed potently to the gradual emergence of radical nationalism.³
- As elsewhere in Africa, under conditions of urbanism, a great many tribal and regional associations had developed. By 1959, in Leopoldville alone there were more than 100 such associations listed. Some of them had grown out of mutual help and benefit groups, others were established for a variety of purposes, including mutual help, as well as the study of the original cultures. Tribal minorities representing specific regions had coalesced into associations, such as e.g. the Federation Kivu-Maniema, Federation Kwango-Kwilu, Fédération Kasafenne, etc... Several major political movements directly grew out of these associations, or were at any rate closely supported by them. Abako, originally devised as “Association pour le maintien, l'unité et l'expansion de la langue

³ It is not a simple game of hazard to notice e.g. that in a region like Kivu Province, the results of the provincial elections show that the radical nationalist party, M.N.O. / Lumumba, was highly successful precisely among those peoples in territories like Punia, Lubutu, parts of Lubero and Beni, Walikale where Kitawala had its strongholds.

kikongo,” which merged with the earlier alumni association “Renaibako” (Renaissance Bakongo) is a case in point. The “Interfédérale des ethnies congolaises” in Leopoldville, which was to acquire political expression under the label P.U.C. and later to dissolve into P.N.P. and other parties, was based on the coalescence of a great number of federations (Kivu-Maniema, Bangala, Basonge, Kwango-Kwilu, Kasai, Batelce, Tedequalac), established by minority groups which were all faced with the common problem of how to defend their interests in the best possible way against the wide-sweeping power of Abako. Puna also was closely linked to earlier associations, like Federation des Bangala and Assoreco (Association des Ressortissants du Haut-Congo). A special case is that of U.N.C. (Union Nationale Congolaise); this party of the Benalulua (Kasai) had its antecedents both in the “Parti de la Défense du Peuple Lulua” and in the “Association des Lulua-Frères.” The latter was a tribal association that, differently from other similar groupings, had been active for quite some time in the rural areas inhabited by the Benalulua as a means for better-organized protection of the global interests of the Benalulua, both against the administration and the expansion of the immigrant Baluba.⁴

- Especially after World War II, a great variety of more modernistic movements arose; most of them were directly encouraged by the missions and the administration, and later also by certain European milieu's in the Congo or by Belgian political parties and trade unions. The most important ones are:
 - The alumni associations, like Adapes (Association des Anciens Élèves des Pères de Scheut), Assanef (Association des Anciens Élèves des Frères des Écoles Chrétiennes), Unelma (Union des Anciens Élèves des Frères Maristes), etc.; they grew strong after World War II with the steady rise of the “évolués.” Their stronghold was in Leopoldville, but they affected most urban areas in the Congo. Strong leadership developed in some of these associations. The primary concern of their members was with problems relating to the improvement of the social status of the new elite. Their activities gave rise to a new comprehensive organization, Unisco (Union des Intérêts Sociaux Congolais, 1945- 1946) that represented a kind of super-study group, in which leaders like J. Kasavubu and J. Bolikango were to emerge in their nationalist role.
 - The social and cultural clubs of “évolués” (cercles d'évolués), which were encouraged by the local administration and spread into the smaller commercial and administrative centers. Their activities were devoted to the organization of leisure and to actual social problems; some of these clubs also took a renewed pride in the study of the cultures and languages of the Congolese.
 - The trade unions. From 1946 on, trade unions within firms only had been allowed; general groupings were permitted from 1957 on. A Catholic organization, C.S.C.C. (later to become U.T.C.), and a socialist one F.G.T.K., then fully organized their activities. Until 1956, the number of affiliations with trade unions had been low. Yet, in 1946, an important incipient union of clerks of the administration had been created under the label Apic. Personalities like A. Pinzi or C. Adoula became notorious leaders in these unions.
 - Many other types of associations developed, each of which contributed to some extent to the rise of nationalism, to the organization of political claims, to the development of leadership,

⁴ It is noticeable that, at one time, both Benalulua and Baluba/ Kasai, together with people from other tribes in Kasai, adhered in Leopoldville to one and the same regional association (Federation Kasarenne); but various events in the rural areas where both groups were intermingled led to scission.

to major political alignments. We can only briefly refer to A.C.M.A.F. (Association des classes Moyennes Africaines, f. 1954); the cooperative societies (91 were constituted in 1958, with heavy concentrations in Oriental and Kivu Provinces); various occupational associations such as A.M.I. (Association des Assistants Médicaux Indigènes); youth movements, such as J.O.C. (Jeunesses Ouvrières Catholiques); sports associations; clubs, some of them interracial; others encouraged by Belgian political parties, etc...

All these associations, whether traditional or modernistic, rural or urban, tribal or regional, prophetic or cultural, were centers of growth for new loyalties, new solidarities, and new responsible leadership; they provided a new organizational basis on which social and later political claims could operate; they were channels through which unity and solidarity between the urban and rural worlds could be achieved; they represented institutions through which new pride in the local cultures and new attachment to the local values could be achieved. Some of them formed the nucleus around that a party would crystalize. Others contributed to the spread of potentially dangerous ideologies of non-commitment, non-participation, radicalism, xenophobia, factionalism, regionalism, "tribalism." The great number of lively and active associations, on the one hand, the failure of broader and stable coalescences between them, on the other hand, together with the multiplicity of roles that some leaders assumed in a variety of even antagonistic associations, contained another disturbing element. On nationalist issues, such as achievement of independence, anti-colonialism, africanization, etc..., they provided the organizational channels through which many people could unite; on national issues, they constituted well-organized and coherent sectarian interests, which would enhance the pressures of regionalism, parochialism, "tribalism."

The Congolese Parties

Apparently nowhere else in Africa has the number of political parties, local interest and individualists, chiefs' lists, been as great as in the Congo. About 120 parties, together with a variety of local groups and individuals, had been competing with one another before independence; some had coalesced into more or less integrated wholes; others segmented into different regionally noncompeting, but nationally competitive, groups; others split into antagonistic wings. Some were allied in cartels on the anti-colonialist or provisional government issues, but divided over their problems regarding the structure of state and government. The political fragmentation and dilution was such that no less than 250 lists of candidates were introduced for the national elections to the chamber of deputies. This dispersal of lists was to benefit the larger parties, which would be able to obtain in many electoral districts a disproportionately high number of seats; the sterility of so many dispersed votes (30% in Katanga; 40% in Kivu; 1/3 in Equatorial Province) would, on the other hand, leave in the vague the question of future aspirations and alignments of a great part of the populations. Yet, notwithstanding the annihilation by the electoral system itself of a number of competing political groups, fourteen parties (Abako, Abazi, Cerea, Coaka, Conakat, M.N.C.-Kalonji, M.N.C.-Lumumba, P.N.P. (internally segmented), P.S.A., Puna, R.D.L.K., Reko, U.N.C., Unimo) and four cartels (three cartels M.N.C.-Lumumba, behind which e. g. Unebafi, in Kivu, and Mouvement Basonge, in Kasai, were camouflaged; the Katangese cartel that incorporated three parties (Atcar, Balubakat, Fedeka) obtained seats in the national chamber of deputies. Moreover, nine seats went to local interest (five) and individual (four) lists. The same group of parties and cartels, to the exclusion of Abazi, shared the eighty-four seats in the national senate together with twenty-three senators, who according to the

Fundamental Law had been designated by the provincial assemblies among the “customary” milieu of chiefs and notables (strictly, only eighteen were required by the Law). The picture that emerged from the provincial elections was understandably more complex: four hundred twenty seats were shared by thirty-six political parties and cartels, and by forty-one independents (representing local interests, individual lists, chiefs’ lists). Although there were many theoretical claims to the contrary, there was no national or territorial party in the Congo. For the national elections, only M.N.C.-Lumumba had submitted lists of candidates in all six provinces; in collaboration with its direct allies (Cartels M.N.C.; Coaka; U.N.C.), it was to win forty-one seats (of one hundred thirty-seven) in five provinces, with heavy concentrations in certain districts of Oriental, Kivu, and Kasai Provinces. P.N.P., which was the moderate counterpart to M.N.C.-Lumumba, would obtain fifteen seats in five provinces; however, since several local parties, e. g. Mederco in Ubangi-Mongala districts (Equatorial Province) and Luka in Kwango district (Leopoldville Province) were allied under this label, P.N.P. did not present a solid homogeneous bloc. The other parties had restricted their activities and campaigns, with varied results, to one province (ex. Cerea in Kivu, or Conakat and Cartel Katangais in Katanga), or to a couple of districts in the same or in different adjoining provinces (ex. Abako, P.S.A., Puna, U.N.C.), or even to a few territories (ex. Unebafi, Abazi). The implication was that most parties were in search of mass support from particular populations, always including at least those with whom the leaders of the respective parties could establish tribal relationships. As a result of this procedure, many regions came to be monopolized by particular parties – as far as the national elections and, in some cases also, the provincial elections, were concerned. Thus, for example, the districts of Ituri and Sankuru were monopolized by M.N.C.-Lumumba; those of Cataracts and Bas-Congo by Abako; the district of Haut-Katanga by Oonakat). Several other districts came under the quasi-monopoly of one party that had had to concede only a very small number of seats to locally competing groups (ex. Oerea in Kivu-Nord district; Puna in Mongala district, M.N.C.-Kalonji in Kabinda district; Katangese Cartel in Haut-Lomami; P.S.A. in Kwilu). However, the electoral results showed at the same time that the situation was more complex at the higher administrative level of the provinces, on the one hand, and at the lower level of the “territoires” and “circonscriptions indigènes,” on the other hand. Except for Oriental Province, where M.N.C.-Lumumba had fifty-eight seats (of seventy) in the provincial elections, the other provinces were subdivided between regional parties with fairly equal strength and many smaller local groups whose alignments might weigh heavily in the balance. In Leopoldville Province, for example, P.S.A. (thirty-five of ninety seats, limited to Kwilu district and part of Kwango district) was in direct antagonism with Abako (thirty-three of ninety seats, restricted to Leopoldville city, Bas-Congo, and Cataract districts, and one “territoire” in Kwango district), whereas the remaining twenty-two were shared by nine other groups (some of which were internally segmented). Similar situations existed in Katanga, and in a still greater multifarious political climate, in Kivu, Equateur and Kasai. At the level of “territoires,” several of them, spread all over the Congo, were monopolized by one of the greater or smaller parties. In many “territoires,” particularly those inhabited by a variety of more or less culturally dissimilar peoples, or those where culturally homogeneous people were traditionally subdivided into antagonistic political units, or those where the traditional allegiances were divided between two or more competing factions of local rulers, or those where locally the degree of distrust in and frustration over traditional and administrative chiefs and notables differed considerably – two or even three smaller or larger parties might have the support of the electorate.

Thus, the situation that resulted from the elections was an extremely complex one. At the national level (chamber and senate) the Congo was confronted by sixteen political groups (some existing under the form of cartels), next to a number of independents and of “customary” senators designated among the traditional political groups. None of the parties had exercised a nation-wide appeal; none had received sufficient mass support so as to be in a majority position; all of them – even M.N.C.-Lumumba – received support only in particular regions. Many parties had hastily been built around disparate associations, or fragments of these associations; they were not well integrated and were nothing else but loose “federations” of local parties united for electoral purposes. Many of the greater parties were polycephalous; two or more leaders were in overt or covert competition; given the ambitions of some of them, given external influences that worked on them, given the fact that all of them were some group's “favored son” who could ultimately count on the support of his tribesmen, this polycephaly was a continued threat to the homogeneous functioning of party structure. This was all the more possible since the parties had weakly developed political platforms. This was understandable, since the parties were very new and tended to avoid specific ideological identification. Moreover, when still in the process of growth, they were already fully involved in painful dialogues with the colonial administration and with one another; their activities and energy were taken up by anti-colonialist slogans, search for rapid achievement of independence, negativistic social attitudes, discussions over the future form of state and government, timing of the stages in the emancipation process, problems of internal leadership, electoral demagoguery, etc..., whereas the constructive work of party building and party consolidation was placed in the background. These factors also accounted for the lability of cartels, “fronts communs,” various other alliances in view of specific purposes, and for the successive adhesions to contradictory political tendencies. At the level of the provinces, only in Oriental Province did one party (M.N.C. Lumumba), with fifty-eight seats out of seventy, seem to hold a quasi-monopoly. In the others, two or more equally powerful and equivalent parties – each with different local support – confronted one another; this would lead to very great difficulties in the building-up of provincial governments and bureaus of the provincial assemblies, with an accrued importance of the minority groups; the insolubility of these problems was to lead rapidly to widespread local autonomist movements expressed in the many claims for the creation of new provinces – claims that ultimately, in 1962, were satisfied in a great many instances.

In the light of the support that all the Congolese parties, in one way or another, received from specific territorial groups, they have most often been identified rather simply as tribal parties. Few concepts have been as widely misused in the literature on Africa as those of “tribe” and “tribal.” The many Congolese populations have come to be known to the outside world under such labels as Baluba, Bakongo, Mongo, etc... These names are supposed to refer to “tribes”; as a matter of fact, each of them covers a multitude of “politically or socially coherent and autonomous groups occupying or claiming a particular territory.”⁵ In other words, the tribes are hidden behind these catchwords – those many groups that bear a distinct name, have developed a distinct sentiment and set of moral and legal obligations, and whose respective cultures and social systems may exhibit as many fundamental dissimilarities as similarities. The striking fact about these tribes is that in most cases they were not politically integrated into states. Yet, in their alignments with parties, these congeries of politically non-integrated tribes have, in many instances, tended to give their support to one party. This means that some kind of political regrouping had been achieved through the parties and that they were not

⁵ This is a classic definition for “tribe,” borrowed from *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*, London 1948, p. 60.

the sheer by-products of “tribes.” But another aspect to the plurality of tribes is also covered under the current denominations. The various territorially and socially distinct tribes, covered under such a general label, did not necessarily or automatically adhere to one and the same party. To give an example, all Baluba did not vote for one party, because the Baluba did not form a simple, monolithic homogeneous bloc. They were subdivided into a number of large, autonomous, territorially distinct, politically non-integrated, culturally and socially dissimilar divisions, such as Baluba-Hemba, Baluba-Shankaji, Baluba-Bambo – each of which was in turn subdivided into other named units to which the abovementioned criteria might be applied as well. Some of these Baluba had developed state-systems; others had segmentary political structures; among others, political integration was at the level of a small group of contiguous villages. Moreover, administratively, they were incorporated into many different “territoires” and districts, extending into three provinces. In each of these administrative units the problems that confronted them were different: in Kivu, as a small minority, they voted M.N.C.-Lumumba or independent; in Katanga, they had their own party (Balubakat) which, in coalition with parties formed by Baluba immigrants from Kasai (dissatisfied with Conakat's slogan “Katanga to the Katangese”) and by Cokwe – traditional opponents of the Lunda –, defended Luba interests against Conakat; however, there was some dissidence here, because some Baluba chiefs allied themselves with Lunda, Yeke, and other chiefs centered around Conakat because of common interests and certain congenialities. In Kasai, the Baluba, in trouble with the linguistically related Benalulua, were isolated and organized themselves in a third party, M.N.C.-Kalonji. When we examine party support from the point of view of the many tribal groups covered by the generally known larger denominations, we realize that all parties had multi-tribal support; we also understand why people known under the same denomination had, under the influence of local administrative, political, religious and social circumstances, been supporting different parties. In this light also, it becomes clear that the drive to the creation of a maximum of twenty-three provinces – twenty of which were already created in November 1962 – cannot to be interpreted as “tribalistic,” since each of the new provinces were inhabited by a variety of tribes. It was – except perhaps for the two or three new provinces, which were dominated by unitarist parties and seemed to have been created against their will – a drive based on cultural and historical considerations and aimed towards the development of provincial multi-tribal one-party systems. Many examples very clearly showed this provincial one-party structure: Kongo-Central: Abako; Kwilu: P.S.A.; Kivu Nord: Cerea; Nord-Katanga: Balubakat; Central Kasai: U.N.C.; Sankuru: M.N.C.-Lumumba; Lomami: Unité Basonge; Unité Kasaienne: Coaka; South-Kasai: M.N.C.-Kalonji; Ubangi: Mederco-Association des Ngbaka; Mongala: Puna; Mayi-ndombe: R.D.L.K.-Unilac. In some of the new provinces, like Kivu-South, Kwango, Maniéma, this trend of one-party structure was less clear.

There were several disturbances visible in some of the greater parties – e.g., in Abako, where next to Alco of D. Kanza (1960) and Rafeco (1961) of Nzeza-Landu, Y. Mabanda has tried to separate the Jeunesses Abake from Abako under the label of P.N.C.P. (Parti National de la Convention du Peuple; 1962), or in M.N.C.-Kalonji, where two factions clustered resp. around A. Kalonji and J. Ngalula.

These are probably only temporary crises, which will be solved because of the many common interests that the peoples concerned have come to share in the past and the dangers that threaten them if they are subdivided. On the other hand, it would seem that political alignments are taking place in some of the new, multi-party provinces between the more moderate elements in these parties. In this context,

several until recently nationally and internationally fairly unknown personalities begin to emerge in the new provincial frameworks, some of whom may well be destined to playing a great role in the future Congo. If we want to understand the role and position of the political parties, we have to follow their activities and development at the level of the new provinces, and not at the national level. The Congo parties are not dead; on the contrary, I think that they are now slowly finding the territorial and cultural bases for their consolidation and full expression; once this is achieved, a closer rapprochement between them seems to be possible.