Nation-Building, Nationalism, and the Power of Religion: the Exploits of a Despot

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Abstract

Following a bloodless coup d'état in 1965, the Democratic Republic of the Congo's new leader, Mobutu Sese Seko, was faced with a number of objectives, the most important of which was the creation of a unified Congolese identity, which would help to prevent the return to political infighting that marked the first five post-independence years. After all, the DRC is a country that is made up of many different tribes and languages, hence the creation of the unified identity was not an easy feat. *Authenticité* — a return to ancestral roots that would take the country forward —, renaming the country Zaire, and putting himself in the position of messianic figurehead were all just vehicles through which Mobutu sought to create this identity while at the same time firmly entrenching his own authority. At the same time, however, religious actors such as the Catholic church and the Kimbanguist church also played their part in uniting the Zairean people under one umbrella. Especially the efforts of the Catholic church were not always appreciated by Mobutu and the two often went head to head during the latter's time in power. In contemporary Congo, Mobutu and his ideology of Mobutism are often held to be two out of a myriad of reasons for the current instability, while the Catholic church is still mending the wounds. Nonetheless, by connecting the evidence from the past to the situation of the present, this thesis will show that all three aforementioned actors nonetheless perform a crucial role in ensuring that the country does not completely disintegrate.

Table of contents

Introduction

Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga, the man originally known by the simpler name Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, is notorious for being the textbook-example of a Cold War dictator. Through a bloodless coup d'état staged in 1965 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), he brought an end to the Congo Crisis, one of the Cold War's many proxy wars. From then on, he ruled the nation with an iron fist for more than thirty years. The DRC transformed into a one-party state named Zaire between 1971 and 1997. Mobutu exploited the country's vast natural resources for his personal enrichment, while the Congolese people were suffering, and his regime was propped up by the United States all the way through for his harsh stance on communism. Many scholars seem to agree that the destructive and kleptocratic nature of his rule is to blame for the Congo's contemporary instability. Nevertheless, to briefly return to the Congo Crisis: Mobutu was faced with an important task as the country's new leader. As the DRC was still a relatively young state, he was beset with the construction of a new Congolese identity, with which he could definitively lift the country out of the colonial era. It is exactly this identity construction process which will serve as the focal point of this thesis.

In 1960, President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba, had to consider the political structure that was to be given to their newly independent country. Kasavubu, for instance, led the *Association des Bakongo* (ABAKO), which was destined specifically for the Bakongo people and supported a federalist structure for the DRC.[1] The *Mouvement National Congolais-Kalonji* (MNC-K), a split-off from the original MNC led by Lumumba, was another example of a party that represented the interests of one particular ethnic group, being the Baluba from the Congo's south. It is clear that the tribal divisions typified by the new political parties of the First Republic were a major facet in the ensuing Congo Crisis. Undoubtedly, Mobutu saw the

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[1] "Congo Crisis", *The Polynational War Memorial*, accessed September 7, 2017, http://www.war-memorial.net/Congo-Crisis-3.128.

removal of tribal tensions as one of his primary tasks upon seizing power for good in 1965. A major step in this process was rebranding the Democratic Republic of the Congo into 'Zaire,' paired with a new anthem and flag — symbols behind which an entire population could rally together as one. Seen from a broader perspective, we can identify Mobutism and *Authenticité*, as being the key ideologies and instruments by which Mobutu and his political party, the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), sought to instill a greater sense of nationhood upon the population.

In spite of the nation-building efforts spearheaded by Mobutu and the MPR, the political arena was not the only location where Zairean identity formation was taking place. Throughout the years, the Catholic church also undertook steps to unite Congolese people with a wide variety of tribal backgrounds. This is partly reflected in the Congo's present-day status as a deeply Catholic nation, with over 35 percent of its inhabitants subscribing to this denomination of Christianity. Another religious actor that was active in the nation-building process was the Kimbanguist church, a faith that is indigenous to the Congo, and which still enjoys a sizable following today. During his reign, Mobutu often found himself at odds with the Catholic church, but not as much with the Kimbanguist church, and part of the objective of this thesis is to uncover the reasons behind this.

The question of Congolese nation-building is relevant for understanding the civil wars that still plague the Congo today. Not a day goes by where inhabitants in (particularly) the DRC's eastern and southern region are forced to flee their homes, or are even killed. It is in these regions that rebel groups literally and figuratively call the shots. The problematic circumstances of the civil war are largely caused by the poor governance of current President Joseph Kabila; as stated by *Global Security*: "absent a hegemon, the Congo provides endless opportunities for plunder."[2] Given that these conflicts play out along ethnic lines, one would be lead to assume that the nation-building project of the latter half of the 20th century has failed. However, despite the deplorable day-to-day

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[2] "Congo Civil War", *Global Security*, accessed September 12, 2017, https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/congo.htm.

situation, the research will show that this quick conclusion is uncorroborated. Therefore, this thesis will link the historical efforts to the contemporary situation, and thereby show that the past helps us to better understand the present.

Before treating the subject matter, the existing scholarship must first be examined. Two concepts closely correlated to nation-building — state-building and identity politics — will feature in this review, as these terms are often jumbled together in academic and policy circles. Beyond the triad of identity politics—nation-building—state-building, the review of the academic literature will also look at the clash between religion and nationalistic discourse. Next, the section on research design will explain in more detail the principal research question, whereafter the three 'substantial' chapters will delve into the differing degrees of success the three actors under study — Mobutu, the Catholic church, and the Kimbanguist church — had in the nation-building exercise.

Review of the academic literature

The aim of this literature review is to embed the current research in the academic field, in relation to concepts such as nation-building, state-building, and identity politics, as well as other key concepts that are crucial to analyzing Mobutu's time as dictator. Based on the existing work, we can identify how in particular this thesis will add to enhancing our knowledge on these topics.

Nations, nationalism, and nation-building

French historian Ernest Renan is one of the most renowned authors on the topic of nationhood. According to Renan, religion plays an important role in nation formation, especially when nations come to be through conquest, as was common in the early modern period. "When victor and vanquished have the same religion, or rather when the victor adopts the religion of the vanquished, there can be no question of the Turkish system of complete discrimination according to a man's religion."[3] While this theory is perhaps not entirely applicable to the case of the Congo, one could extrapolate the relationship between victor and vanquished, as described by Renan, to the relationship between colonial overlord and subject. In terms of religion, the presence and perseverance of the Kimbanguist church — despite its regional concentration — can, for example, be seen as a unifying factor for Congolese nationhood. Later on in this thesis, it will indeed be shown that Mobutu looked more favorably upon the Kimbanguist church than other religious actors, mostly due to Kimbanguism's authentic Congolese grounding.

Another seminal work on the concept of 'nation' is *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson. In this volume, he admits that terms like 'nation,' 'nationality' and 'nationalism' are difficult to define.[4] Anderson takes an anthropological stance on nations when he writes that "I

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[3] Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?", in *Modern Political Doctrines*, ed. Alfred Zimmern (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), 189.

[4] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 3.

propose the following definition of nation: it is an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* [emphasis in the original] because the members of even the smallest nations never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."[5] Anderson's theory is relevant for understanding the case of the Congo, but seems to lack a focus on top-down approaches for the creation of such an imagined community, as was the case with Mobutu's *Authenticité* efforts. His work does point to the challenge faced by most leaders in shaping their nations from the ground up: to find the factors that bind the population living in a given territory together. In the case of the Congo, however, one can argue that shared history under colonial leadership gives rise to a sentiment of shared suffering that, in the end, assists the nation-building process in the post-independence era. Surely, the process of colonization that started out with the Scramble for Africa, helped to create a more concrete image of the otherwise imagined community that is the DRC.

A common criticism of academic work on the concept of nation-building is the fact that it leaves a country's ethnic diversity out of the equation. Writing in 1972, Connor pointed out that in 39 out of the 132 'contemporary' states (at the time) — 29.5 percent — the largest ethnic group constituted less than half of the state's population. "Moreover, this portrait of ethnic diversity becomes more vivid when the number of distinct ethnic groups within states is considered. In some instances, the number of groups within a state runs into the hundreds, and in 53 states (40.2 percent of the total), the population is divided into more than *five* significant groups [emphasis in the original]."[6] Fast forwarding to the modern era, we can observe that ethnic diversity around the world has only increased, largely due to the forces of globalization. Moreover, Connor identifies the rise of ethnic nationalism as a barrier to the proper functioning of postcolonial African states. By means of a 'solution', the mass party (of which Mobutu's MPR is a notable example) is used as "a

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[5] Ibid., 5-6.

[6] Walker Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?". *World Politics* 24, no. 3 (April 1972): 320.

means of masking ethnic rivalry; identification of the individual with the party has been missing."[7] More recent work by Riggs tells us that "Traditionally, language and religion often served as markers that distinguished members of dominant communities from others. Such distinctions were easily maintained under the caste-like conditions that prevailed when royal sovereignty was seen as supernaturally grounded. The secularization inherent in the move from sacred to popular sovereignty undermined these distinctions and made them seem increasingly irrational."[8] While in his research, Riggs refers to democracies (and it would, of course, be problematic to characterize Mobutu's Zaire as such), his theory falls short of explaining the situation in post-independence Congo and postcolonial states in Africa in general. Especially the case of Zaire shows us that religion serves as a unifier rather than a divider. Linguistic differences are indeed applicable to Zaire, but so far have not been utilized to great lengths so as to give one ethnic group the upper hand over another.

Bridging the divide with state-building and identity politics

It is important to distinguish between 'nation-building' and 'state-building.' The former refers to a process of identity formation, which would also be the logical conclusion from the manner in which authors like Anderson treats the subject, whereas the latter concerns the construction of a functioning state, and is thus more materialist in nature. Theorization on state-building often occurs in Weberian terms, where the nature of a state is defined by the existence of a monopoly on the use of force. According to Lemay-Hébert, "following a very specific reading of Weber, state institutions are autonomized from their societal moorings, allowing scholars to differentiate state-building from nation-building activities."[9]

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[7] Ibid., 353.

[8] Fred W. Riggs, "Globalization, Ethnic Diversity, and Nationalism: the Challenge for Democracies", *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 581 (May 2002): 39.

[9] Nicolas Lemay-Hébert, "Rethinking Weberian Approaches to State-building", in *The Routledge Handbook of International State-building*, eds. Timothy D. Sisk and David Chandler (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 11.

Placing this debate in an African context, Herbst argues that state-building on the continent is difficult due to the forms of governance imposed during the colonial era. The (capital) cities that were established in their colonial territories "did not serve as the basis of state creation in the same manner as occurred in Europe because the colonizers were not interested in duplicating the power infrastructure which bound city to hinterland in their homelands."[10] Many capitals are based on the ocean, as the Europeans moved them away from the interior, which left the latter neglected. This practice continued as independence came around: "The nationalists received states that were appropriate to the way they had conducted their politics: primarily urban, with few links to the surrounding countryside where most of the population lived. In turn, they furthered the urban bias of their states by marginalizing peasant populations and by providing urban groups with privileged access to many of the resources allocated by the state."[11] Especially in its first few post-independence years, this theory holds true for the DRC, as well, as the country experienced a political fracture between the capital, the east, and the mineral-rich south during the Congo Crisis.

Closely linked to notions such as nation-building and state-building is the concept of identity politics. As stated in the introduction, it can be argued that the three ideas form a coherent triad, due to the constant interlinkage between them. Theorization about identity politics is relatively new in academia, tracing its roots to the latter half of the 20th century in the United States, with the advent of large-scale political movements focusing on topics such as second wave feminism, black civil rights, and gay and lesbian liberation. Despite being far removed in time and space from Mobutu's Zaire, one can extend its application to the case currently under study when looking at what identity politics entails: "Identity politics starts from analyses of oppression to recommend, variously, the reclaiming, redescription, or transformation of previously stigmatized accounts of group membership. Rather than accepting the negative scripts offered by a dominant

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[10] Jeffrey Herbst, "The Challenge of State-Building in Africa", in *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

[11] Ibid., 18.

culture about one's own inferiority, one transforms one's own sense of self and community, often through consciousness-raising."[12] Identity politics is not to be confused with the study of political culture. Political culture looks at facets on a national level, such as national values, beliefs, and ideology, whereas identity politics looks at those values and orientation *within* society, i.e. on a sub-national level.[13]

According to Hobsbawm, collective identities are defined in a negative sense. This reminds us of the eternal 'us versus them' principle. "'We' recognize ourselves as 'us' because we are different from 'Them'. If there were no 'They' from whom we are different, we would not have to ask ourselves who 'We' were."[14] Whether this description holds true for the DRC is questionable, since identity and belonging in this country is played out along tribal lines. It is these very tribal differences that still plague the DRC's east and south today. In the context of Mobutu's reign, the key objective for the leader was to create a unified, Congolese identity that superseded the tribal divisions in a country whose borders were drawn by colonial hands. This section can be summed up via another difference between identity politics and nation-building: the former mostly deals with bottom-up approaches for binding a group of people together, which may be inferred from the definition presented above, while nation-building, on the other hand, is more top-down. It is this top-down approach, headed by institutions such as the MPR, the Catholic church, and the Kimbanguist church, that will be most relevant for this thesis.

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[12] Cressida Hayes, "Identity Politics", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed September 30, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/.

[13] Howard J. Wiarda, *Political Culture, Political Science, and Identity Politics: an Uneasy Alliance* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 148.

[14] Eric Hobsbawm, "Identity Politics and the Left", *Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust*, accessed October 2, 2017, http://banmarchive.org.uk/articles/1996%20annual%20lecture.htm.

Incongruity between nationalist discourse and religion

The history of global politics informs us that nationalism and religion are very often mutually exclusive as determinants for nation-building. This is especially true for nationalist dictatorships. One need to only consider, for example, the Soviet Union, where the state conducted an organized campaign against all forms of religion with the end goal of establishing what was known as state atheism. According to Vladimir Lenin himself, "All modern religions and churches, all and of every kind of religious organizations are always considered by Marxism as the organs of bourgeois reaction, used for the protection of the exploitation and the stupefaction of the working class."[15] This may be seen as the official party directive, but in between the lines, this campaign against the churches in the Soviet Union was also aimed at eradicating any form of power competition vis-à-vis the regime. In Zaire, this was likely no different, as soon enough, Mobutu realized the mobilizing potential of the churches, and the danger this could present for the stability of his nationalist leadership.

Nonetheless, it is also important to consider how nationalism and religion can influence one another. According to Riefer, the many renowned authors on the topic of nationalism, some of which have been mentioned in this literature review, such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm, have stayed largely silent on the interplay between the two.[16] Another example of anti-religious zeal in history is Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's campaign in the newly formed state of Turkey in the 1920s, where he sought to rid Turkey of all forms of religion, for this would be the only way to achieve some sense of modernity. This example hints more at the cultural aspect of religion and the influence this bears over society, which already comes closer to the Zairean case. Riefer argues that both nationalism and religion can help people to formulate a sense of identity,[17]

[15] Vladimir I. Lenin, *Collected Works Volume 17: December 1910-April 1912*, trans. Dora Cox, ed. George Hanna (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963).

[16] Barbara-Ann J. Rieffer, "Religion and Nationalism: Understanding the Consequences of a Complex Relationship", *Ethnicities* 3, no. 2 (2003): 216.

[17] Ibid., 217-8.

and this definitely holds true for Zaire, but what is still missing here is the full encompassment of the postcolonial perspective. Most of the academic literature on nationalism (and the influence of religion) is modeled on the nation formation process in Europe, which followed a more natural pattern throughout history. Elsewhere in the world, with the Congo and Africa in general being prominent examples, colonialism wrought havoc upon this natural process, and in a number of cases, identity formation had to start completely anew. While in the Congo the Catholic church had a lingering influence deriving from the beginning of the 20th century, this is not the case for the nationalist program of *Authenticité*, which will be outlined in greater detail below.

Research design

Following the review of the academic literature, we have seen that nation-building, state-building, and identity politics all bear some degree of relevance towards our understanding of Mobutu's cultural policy of *Authenticité*. Next to *Authenticité*, another important driver of identity formation was (and is) the Catholic church, which begs the question: under which banner is the population more effectively unified, under a common nationality or a common religion? This points us towards the central research question that will be posed in this thesis, namely **"What impact did Mobutism have on the societal role played by the Catholic church and other religious actors in nation-building in Zaire and the Congo?"** In order to derive the answer to this, a framework consisting of several elements of the existing scholarship on nationalism has been the developed. These points of comparison have largely been adapted from the works of Grosby[18] and Miscevic[19]:

- How loyalty to the institution in question is fostered, what the nature of the pro-national attitude is, and what guardianship of the institution consists of.

- The nature of belonging to the institution, and what benefits the 'subjects' gain from their admission to the institution in question.

- What behavioral code the institution in question imposes on its 'subjects'.

While theories of nationalism are, of course, almost exclusively applicable to nations, this paper will treat the MPR, the Catholic church, and the Kimbanguist church on an equal footing — all three being referred to above as an 'institution'. Furthermore, several sub-questions have been formulated, which will help the reader to deal with the subject matter of the individual chapters. The answers to these sub-questions can then be bound together so as to provide a more comprehensive answer to the central research question. The sub-questions are as follows:

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[18] Steven Grosby, *Nationalism: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[19] Nenad Miscevic, "Nationalism", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 24, 2018, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/.

- What were the aims of ideologies and programs such as Mobutism and *Authenticité*?

- How did ordinary Zaireans respond to Mobutu's crusade against the Catholic church?

- What role was played by traditional beliefs, such as Kimbanguism?

- Can Mobutu be held responsible for the fact that contemporary Congo has not yet disintegrated?

When it comes to theories of international relations, one theory that is well-suited for the case at hand is constructivism. Fierke writes that "Constructivists embrace an intersubjective ontology, emphasizing norms, social agents, and structures, and the mutual constitution of identity, but accept an epistemology indebted to positivism."[20] Hence, constructivism will serve as the lens through which the problem at hand — the interaction between Mobutu's policies and the Catholic and Kimbanguist churches in Zairean nation-building and identity formation — will be studied. This means that the source material that will be used, both primary and secondary, is to be treated in such a way that it becomes evident that the setting in which Zaire found itself is the result of ongoing social practice and interaction.

The current research design is within-case with a historical perspective, but the thesis is not bound to one specific methodology. Rather, the choice has been made to gather a wide range of data and source material on the topic, and to evaluate each source on its own merit. What can be said in favor of this approach is that data collection and interpretation are core tenets of positivism (the philosophical system that holds that every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically proven), and hence stand at the core of the constructivist lens of this paper. The most important piece of data under study will be the number of churchgoers in Zaire in the time of Mobutu. With accurate statistics on the matter, as well as the number of followers in other religions in the country,

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[20] Karin M. Fierke, "Constructivism", in *International Relations Theory: Discipline and Diversity*, eds. Tim Dunne *et al.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193.

such as Kimbanguism, we will be able to assess the causal extent to which Mobutu's campaign against the Catholic church influenced the church's position as unifier in an otherwise divided Zaire.

Beyond evaluating religious statistics of the Zairean population under the Mobutu regime, a significant portion of this paper will also be devoted to the qualitative study of both primary and secondary sources. In doing so, it is important to ensure the diversity in this wealth of sources, as Thies warns: "Relying exclusively on autobiographical accounts would bias your interpretation in favor of the way the participants viewed the situation. How was the event reported in the newspapers, and what other contemporaneous account can you find? By triangulating with different sources of evidence to maximize your archival coverage you should be able to reveal inaccuracies or biases in the individual sources, and ultimately construct a more accurate representation of history."[21] With this advice in mind, it will be a principal objective of this thesis to also explore if there have been positive accounts of Mobutu's policies amid the vast range of sources that discredit the authoritarian regime.

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[21] Cameron G. Thies, "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations," *International Studies Perspectives* 3 (2002): 357.

Building Zaire from the ground up

This section of the paper aims to explore the core tenets of Mobutu Sese Seko's political thought. After having staged a bloodless coup d'état for the second time in 1965, Mobutu sought to unify the citizens of the Congo (henceforth named Zaire) under one flag, thereby facilitating the project of nation-building. In a report that explores the system of patrimonialism that characterized much of Mobutu's rule, Robinson writes that "in 1965, Mobutu faced the dual challenge of taking control of the deeply fractured ex-colony and then organizing political institutions in a way that would allow him to keep it. He had a bureaucracy and army of sorts, but could not rely on anybody's loyalty. And he was also short of funds; most of the vast mineral wealth of the country (cobalt, copper, gold, and diamonds) was still controlled by foreigners."[22]

Robinson also discusses the possible Weberian route Mobutu could have taken towards statehood by establishing a monopoly on violence, but one obstacle on this route is that "Mobutu would have had to trust that his army would obey him."[23] The general political framework later known as Mobutism was the ideology that guided Mobutu's *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), as well as policymaking in Zaire, throughout his reign. The policy of *Authenticité*, on the other hand, was a specific tool of identity formation employed by Mobutu to rid Zaire from Western influences and unify Zaireans under their pre-colonial roots. The ideological position of the MPR was determined to be a combination of Mobutism and *Authenticité*, as laid out in the Manifesto of N'sele. Effectively, *Authenticité* can be seen as falling under Mobutism, but for the purposes of this paper, the two will be treated in turn.

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[22] James A. Robinson, *Curing the Mal Zaïrois: the Democratic Republic of Congo Edges toward Statehood* (London: Legatum Institute, 2013), 5.

[23] Ibid., 7.

Mobutism

First and foremost, it should be noted that Mobutu's coup in 1965 was apolitical in nature, meaning that when he took control of the Congo, he did not do so with a carefully crafted political roadmap in mind. According to Charlton, this is also a general characteristic shown in more seizures of power by military leaders in history, who often cite national reconstruction and the resolving of outstanding disputes as the principal reason for their intervention.[24] Soon enough, however, the military factor was removed from the power equation, as Mobutu sought to garner political legitimacy through the establishment of a party led by himself. This would be the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* (MPR), which came into existence in April 1967 through the infamous Manifesto of N'sele (infamous, as the manifesto is often compared to other 'political bibles' such as Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book*[25]). From the outside, and in its initial stages, the MPR had to represent a popular movement — as the name suggests — but effectively, Mobutu's power was hereby firmly entrenched in the constitutional sense of the word. This was only part of the program to turn Zaire into a single-party state, and thus a core element of Mobutism.

He came ever closer to achieving his goal of unifying party, people, and state, as he once told parliament that "The Congolese people and I are one and the same."[26] He also showed that he wanted to make haste with this goal as he outlawed the existence of other political parties and the near-to enforcement of membership to the party on the population, declaring that all citizens had to become members of the MPR at birth. Through an amendment introduced in 1970, the MPR was declared the supreme institution of the state. In other words, the state Zaire became an organ of the MPR.[27] A manner in which Mobutu further expanded his grip over the country was through a

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[24] Mark W. Charlton, "Mobutism: the Politics of Authenticity in Zaire" (master's thesis, University of Western Ontario, 1976), 65.

[25] Van Reybrouck, *Congo*, 342.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Shawn H. McCormick, "Zaire II: Mobutu, Master of the Game?", *Current History* 93, no. 583 (May 1994): 224.

massive centralization process, as described by Hesselbein: "The number of provinces was gradually reduced from twenty-one to eight (plus Kinshasa), and their previous financial autonomy was re-centralized through the presidency, which proved to be more efficient at allocating resources than the previously autonomous provincial authorities. … State representatives were shifted around the country every three years and normally could not serve in their home area."[28] According to Kazadi, Mobutism was one of the factors that led to the development of a cult of personality around Mobutu, as the system which the dictator himself created allowed him to move freely in that same system and take on more responsibility and status as the years went by. "First billed as the savior of the country, Mobutu became the "father of the revolution." A few years later, he became the "guide" who was "married" to his people through an eternal contract."[29]

In broad strokes, the ideology of Mobutism, with *Authenticité* at its core, is a means of mass mobilization, an act that can be achieved by "bringing under control those peripheral areas of the political system that have previously been outside the reach of the central authority."[30] A key step in realizing this mass mobilization, and thereby also a central element in Mobutism, is the distance from the game of politics that the leader imposes upon him or herself. Criticizing the leaders that preceded him and declaring himself to be the only solution to the political infighting and corruption that marked the period from 1960 to 1965, Mobutu saw that asserting the apolitical nature of both his leadership and the MPR as party were important measures to take. His rising above the political struggles of the past immensely assisted in shaping his personal image of unifier and nation-builder.[31] In the early years of his rule, the existence of Mobutism was marked by actions that served to enhance Zaire's national prestige. This was, then, often used as a justification of unpopular

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28 Gabi Hesselbein, "The Rise and Decline of the Congolese State: an Analytical Narrative on State-Making", Crisis States Working Papers Series no. 2, London School of Economics, November 2007, http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.614.204&rep=rep1&type=pdf, 25.

29 F.S.B. Kazadi, "Mobutu, MPR, and the Politics of Survival", *Africa Report* 23, no. 1 (Jan. 1978): 15.

30 Charlton, "Mobutism", 128.

31 Ibid., 130.

policy, an example here being the currency devaluation of 1967. Furthermore, the text of Mobutu's first speech before the United Nations General Assembly was turned into mandatory study material; with the content of the speech itself Mobutu raised himself to the level of principal spokesperson for Africa in the forum for global affairs, as well as principal ally of the Arab countries in their struggle against Israel.[32]

On a local, regional level, the MPR was running like a well-oiled machine and used coercion as a tool to bring different strata of the population together. Charlton, for instance, writes of mandatory attendance at party rallies and parades, which was checked by party officials. "When the actual event takes place, all of the bars, shops and offices are closed and the business and social life of the community grinds to a halt. If the town is big enough, buses and trucks are commandeered by the party in order to transport as many of the rally as possible."[33] The essence of mobilizing the population in order to achieve prosperity seems to have been a remnant of Mobutu's state visits to China. In 1973 and 1974, he visited China and each time was amazed at the country's economic self-sufficiency and mobilizing capacities of the population. Therefore, China had to serve as an example for Zaire in years to come.

Authenticité

The ideological path the Mobutu government undertook towards creating a unified nation-state is not seen by scholars as a healthy one. Young and Turner even go so far as to call the policy of authenticity and the overarching framework of Mobutism a "modernized version of Leopoldian absolutism."[34] For Mobutu, *Authenticité* represented a return to the Congo's ancestral roots, but in such a way that it would not block the country's road to modernity. In his words, it would be a

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[32] Ibid., 137.

[33] Ibid., 154.

[34] Crawford Young and Thomas Turner, *The Rise and Decline of the Zairian State* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 43.

recours à l'authenticité as opposed to a *retour à l'authenticité*.[35] It has been variously described by the leader as "'the motor in the construction of the nation', 'the cement which holds the entire structure together', and the device to 'stop the mental alienation brought by the colonial experience.'"[36] As a unifying force, *Authenticité* only began to take root in the early 1970s. "In 1974, the party institutionalized Mobutism with the following pronouncement: "Authenticity is the ideology; authentic Zairian nationalism is the doctrine; and the return to authenticity is the method. Together the three stages represent Mobutism, the thought and reason of Mobutu.""[37] Thus linked together in an intricate manner, it would become evident that the revamping of a Zairean identity would take place across different levels of society. At the nationwide level, the rebranding of country from 'Congo' to 'Zaire' obviously jumps to mind — a policy accompanied by the adoption of the MPR emblem as the flag of the new country. At the same time, it was declared that the famous river found in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as well as the national currency would also carry the name 'Zaire'.

Similar to other countries that have attempted to reinvent themselves throughout history, Mobutu also instituted a dress code reform, a practice that affected the Zairean people directly (in their wardrobes). Women were henceforth only allowed to wear the *pagne* (a multicolored long cloth) whereas men had to drop the European suit in favor of the Maoist-inspired *abacost*. Furthermore, the French terms of formal address, *Monsieur* and *Madame*, were forcibly traded in for the terms *Citoyen* and *Citoyenne*, which carried with it a revolutionary connotation. Ironically, however, the dress code and address reforms had the unwanted side effect of making a statement about class. The label of *Citoyen* was often reserved for foreign minorities, while the ordinary

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[35] Ibid., 212.

[36] Kenneth Lee Adelman, "The Recourse to Authenticity and Négritude in Zaïre", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 13, no. 1 (1975): 134.

[37] Kazadi, "Mobutu", 15.

Zaireans often could not afford the *abacost*,[38] thereby making these forms of authenticity inaccessible to the lower classes.

In the same vein as renaming the country, personal names as well as other prominent geographical names were also changed. Examples include the change from the capital Léopoldville to Kinshasa and Stanleyville into Kisangani; Mobutu himself discarded his Christian first name of Joseph-Désiré in lieu of the more authentic name Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga. According to Dunn, "It would be a mistake to assume that this act of (re)naming was an attempt to bring the past back to life. Rather, it was transformative in that it sought to create new knowledge formations: 'the naming, the representing, and the claiming are all one; the naming brings the reality of order into being.'"[39] Rather than speaking of a *recours* or a *retour à l'authenticité*, Lagae and De Raedt argue that the policy can better be seen in Hobsbawmian terms as the 'invention of tradition', which is best showcased in the funding and subsidies given to selected art schools and artists, for example, who were tasked with defining "a new artistic language rooted in the local tradition."[40]

In the same article, the two authors show that architectural designs from the early Mobutu years can also be seen as a manifestation of *Authenticité*. An architect named Eugène Palumbo, who made many designs for buildings in Kinshasa said himself that the mural decorations found on, for instance, the Tribunal de 1ère instance or the Church of Très Saint Sacrément are signs of authenticity in Kinshasa's architectural landscape, but that this nonetheless should not be confused with the rise of a genuine Zairean style of architecture. Many more designs created by Palumbo and others never came into fruition due to the economic crisis Zaire tumbled into starting in the 1970s. "Until this day, the urban landscape of Kinshasa … thus remains largely defined by edifices dating from the colonial era, testifying to the fact that the legacy of Mobutu's policy of *recours à*

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[38] Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 117.

[39] Kevin C. Dunn, "Imagining Mobutu's Zaïre: the Production and Consumption of Identity in International Relations", *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 30, no. 2 (2001): 240.

[40] Johan Lagae and Kim de Raedt, "Building for "l'Authenticité": Eugène Palombo and the Architecture of Mobutu's Congo", *Journal of Architectural Education* 68, no. 2 (2014): 179.

l'authenticité remains, above all, embedded in words, music, and ephemeral images rather than being imprinted in stone."[41]

Another way in which the landscape of cities like Kinshasa changed was the tearing down of statues remnant of the past, such as those of Henry Morton Stanley and King Léopold II. Adelman says that "authenticity ought to be evaluated by its results rather than by the depth of its metaphysics",[42] and the tearing down of these statues seems to be an appropriate example in this regard. However, Sakombi Inongo, one of the chief ideologues of the Mobutu regime, said that he did not "consider authenticity 'as a reaction, against the old colonizers and even less a vengeance, but as a positive affirmation of ourselves. If we take down the statue of Léopold II, this is not to denigrate his memory but because the principle monument of a capital cannot be consecrated to the glory of a foreigner.'"[43] This seems to show that *Authenticité* in Zaire can equally be seen as both a physical and a mental process with many facets. The successes of these projects in unifying a divided nation is to be evaluated in the following two chapters.

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[41] Ibid., 186-7.

[42] Adelman, "Recourse to Authenticity", 135.

[43] Ibid., 137.

Religion as a unifying force in Mobutu's Zaire

The links between religion and state formation in Zaire are extensive, to say the least. Religion has been an important force in both cultural and political affairs during the time of Mobutu, and still continues to embody this significant role in contemporary Zaire. One needs to only refer to the statistics to see this. Kaputu writes that "In the contemporary era, the majority of the residents are Christian — 50 percent are Roman Catholic and 20 percent are Protestant — while 10 percent are Muslim and another 10 percent are Kimbanguist, with the remaining 10 percent belonging to other syncretic and indigenous faiths."[44] Christianity was, of course, by and large a byproduct of colonization. The Belgian missionaries that traveled to the area known as the Belgian Congo over the course of the 19th and the early 20th century spread Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in the areas they visited, for they reasoned that the traditional religious practices which they encountered were "uncivilized, primitive, and unworthy."[45] From Belgium's perspective, it was the church's task to assist in completing the infamous 'civilizing mission' that sought to create "a healthy, literate, and disciplined workforce, one that was obedient to the governing authorities. From the perspective of the church, evangelization was the primary goal, and the number of converts baptized was the measure of its success."[46]

Over time, rituals borrowed from shamanism and black magic have started to become intermingled with the Roman Catholic and Protestant influences, but the latter two are still distinguishable as two remarkable variables in the equation of Zairean nation-building under the reign of Mobutu Sese Seko. It is important to note the difference between colonial times and the Mobutu era in this regard, as during the time of colonialism "church and state goals were sufficiently complementary that the state and the church were perceived by the population as

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[44] Felix Ulombe Kaputu, "Democratic Republic of the Congo", in *Encyclopedia of World Religion*, eds. Wade Clark Roof and Mark Juergensmeyer (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 287.

[45] Ibid., 288.

[46] *Congo Democratic Republic Foreign Policy and Government Guide Volume 1: Strategic Information and Developments* (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, 2011), 103.

sharing the same purpose."[47] During the time of Mobutu, however, this changed as Mobutu saw the church as a threat to the authority he could exercise over the state. Despite Mobutu's (ironical) 'crusade' against the Catholic church, it would still remain on the political and cultural scene as a force to be reckoned with. With that in mind, this section of the paper is devoted to analyzing the role of the Catholic church in Zairean nation-building from 1965 onwards, whereafter attention will also be devoted to the lingering influence of traditional beliefs, of which Kimbanguism was (and is) the most pertinent. Last of all, the paper will study the way in which Mobutu attempted to turn his ideology of Mobutism into a replacement for religion and promoted himself as being at the helm of this 'invented' church.

Influence of the Catholic church

In order to evaluate the role that the Catholic church had in the nation-building process in Zaire, this paper will evaluate this actor along three variables: the nature of loyalty, the meaning of 'belonging', and the behavioral code imposed on followers. As described before, the Catholic church became prevalent in the Congo when it was governed by the Belgian colonial administration, which fervently employed Catholicism as a tool to take Congo out of its 'backwardness'. According to Sundkler and Steed, this led to a situation where the Catholic church became closely intertwined with the habits and day-to-day life of the Congolese, rather than remaining a force that simply 'hovers' above the population. This is shown in the fact that Belgian missions active in the Congo educated local Congolese in the ways of the Catholic church: "In 1946 the first three African priests of Kinshasa were ordained, among them the future Cardinal Malula and the future assistant bishop of Kinshasa, Mgr Moke. The emerging class of *évolués* were closely related to the Catholic church."[48] By *évolué,* the authors mean to denote the section of Congolese society that, during

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[47] Ibid.

[48] Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 764.

colonial times, was attaining to a higher standard of living, mostly expressed through customs and culture. Hence, the Catholic church came to be associated with the upper strata of society. Over time, the number of Catholics in the Belgian Congo increased significantly. In 1920, the country had 655,000 Catholics in a population of 10 million, whereas by 1960, the year of independence, this had increased to 5.7 million followers in a population of 15.2 million, well over one-third.[49] Even when Congo became independent and when its name changed into Zaire, the Catholic church remained popular, with the statistics showing that between 35 percent and 45 percent of the Zairean population subscribed to being Roman Catholic. This general growth trend continued across the African continent as a whole in the post-independence era.[50]

When Mobutu ascended to power, the struggle between church and state would pan out to be more of a personal duel between between the dictator himself and the Belgian-trained cardinal Joseph Malula, who was appointed as archbishop of Kinshasa in July 1964. Despite both being self-declared "protagonists of 'Africanization' to replace the traumatic experience of colonial rule"[51], Mobutu increasingly began to use the Catholic church as a scapegoat for Zaire's economic and political problems. In particular, he was annoyed at "the 'foreignness' of the Catholic church, its links with Rome and the West, while in his eyes Protestants and Kimbanguists were above such suspicion, as they appeared not to take orders from abroad."[52] This prompted several moves that would serve to limit the power of the Catholic church in Zaire, which will be outlined in greater detail further on. In the early years of Mobutu's rule, the relationship can be characterized as cordial, especially from the perspective of the Catholic church. In 1965, Malula issued a declaration that addressed Mobutu personally, in which he stated that "'the Church recognizes your authority,

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[49] Ibid., 768.

[50] See Appendix 1.

[51] Ibid., 965-6.

[52] Ibid., 966.

because authority comes from God. We will loyally apply the laws you establish. You can count on us in your work of restoring the peace toward which all so ardently aspire.'"[53]

In terms of answering the nation-building questions of this thesis, it can be said that the Catholic church in Zaire had a strong leadership in the form of Malula. Boyle writes that in 1961, a Zairean priest took control of the Church's large school system,[54] which shows that the nature of belonging to the Church for Zairean people was involuntary in such a way that it was homegrown through the educational system, which even progressed up to the tertiary level with the University of Lovanium, a university with a Catholic outlook, and one of the few universities in the country. Furthermore, "the independence generation counted on the institutional strengths of a slowly Africanizing church to assist in reestablishing social stability. … The belief among Zairean Catholics that working for the church was contributing to national development gave energy to the effort."[55] This is proof of the fact that the role of the Catholic church in Zairean nation-building was very much taken for granted, and that the Zairean people at the grassroots level wished to contribute to the work of the church, which indirectly is a method to foster loyalty, as well. It was exactly this foreign support that annoyed Mobutu, from which the church generated a lot of its power. According to Young and Turner,

> the hierarchy and worldwide structure of the church provided an institutional infrastructure of resiliency and solidity. … Until the 1950s the church provided to Zairians the only avenue of social promotion where full equality with Europeans could be obtained, and the priesthood attracted some of the most gifted young men of the pre-independence generations. … As a result of these conditions the church was much more than a community of believers; it was an organization of national scope, whose penetration of the interior was comparable in scale to that of the state, and whose social service structures were generally far more effective."[56]

[53] Jeffrey Haynes, "Religion and Democratization in Africa", in *Religion and Political Change in the Modern World*, ed. Jeffrey Haynes (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 95-6.

[54] Patrick M. Boyle, "Beyond Self-Protection to Prophecy: the Catholic church and Political Change in Zaire", *Africa Today* 39, no. 3 (3rd quarter 1992): 49-66.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 66.

In areas such as healthcare and education, the statistics speak in favor of the Catholic church: "In 1974 Catholic schools enrolled 61.7 percent of Zaire's primary pupils and 42.1 percent of its secondary students, as compared to 13.8 percent and 35.4 percent in the state schools. … official estimates in 1972 conceded that 75 percent of the meager health services available to rural populations came through the churches."[57] These numbers give the Catholic church a solid foundation to stand on, and facilitate the mission of uniting many Zaireans, regardless of their tribal heritage, under the banner of Roman Catholicism in Zaire. That the Catholic church so significantly outperformed the government in 1974, nine years after Mobutu's ascendancy, and several years after the start of the *Authenticité* campaign, only further supports this argument. Although he originally endorsed Mobutu in public, Cardinal Malula would later speak on behalf of many concerned Zaireans, Roman Catholic in nature but also extending beyond this category. He did so at the tenth anniversary of Zaire's independence, in the presence of both Mobutu and the Belgian King Baudouin. "He regretted the inequities of resource distribution, and denounced political elites for "a fascination with the triumphant and the superficial, and a hunger for the lavish. To Mobutu this was an unforgiveable [sic] act of lèse-majesté, though he did not respond immediately."[58] The response may indeed not have been immediate, but Mobutu did take care to limit the power and efficacy of the Catholic church as much as he could.

Bringing the MPR into the mix: a valid replacement for religious beliefs?

In studying the role of the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution*, and in answering the nation-building-related subquestions associated with the MPR's activities, we can again focus on education and the role of the youth. Instrumental in the MPR's desire to prepare the nation's youth to take the reins in a future Second Republic where Mobutism was still alive and kicking, was the

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[57] Ibid, 67.

[58] Ibid.

Jeunesse du Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (JMPR), the MPR's youth wing. According to Schatzberg, "in March 1975 the pivotal role of Zairian youth was underscored when a special session of the party's ideological institute was held for JMPR leaders from all parts of the country. At that gathering, the State Commissioner for Political Affairs characterized 'the school, by the fact that it diffuses a common system of ideas, feelings, habits, and beliefs … as the integrative milieu *par excellence*' [emphasis in the original]."[59] The establishment of the JMPR was an initiative from the upper echelons of the MPR, and was in no way actually a desire from students in Zaire for an organization that would represent their interests. Hence, the creation of this organization can be seen as a classic example of top-down nation-building as opposed to bottom-up.

The JMPR can be ascribed with partial success in its mission of inculcating the Zairean student body with the core tenets of Mobutism. Schatzberg argues that this is because of the general vagueness surrounding some of the core concepts that are central to Mobutism, such as the words *authenticité, radicalisation*, and *révolution*. *Authenticité* had been successful in the sense that it was commonly observed throughout the 1970s that the Zairean people (including the Zairean youth) now reflect on their heritage with pride. It "has been grasped not only by the political leadership … but by many ordinary folk as well. The idea of an authentic way of doing things, of a recourse to ancestral customs, as well as the concomitant pride in these traditions is one of the striking achievements of the Mobutu regime and should not be minimized."[60] The meaning of the terms *radicalisation* and *révolution* — terms that appeared often in political speeches at the time — on the other hand, was poorly understood. Furthermore, the leadership of the MPR placed a lot of emphasis on preparing students for their future lives dwelling in rural areas, "since that is where many of them come from and where the vast majority of the population as a whole still lives. In the schools, as in other domains, until July 1975 this ideological impulse was translated into a program

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[59] Michael G. Schatzberg, "*Fidélité au Guide*: the JMPR in Zairian Schools", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 16, no. 3 (1978): 417.

[60] Ibid., 427.

of unpaid communal agricultural work called *Salongo*, generally on one afternoon a week."[61] The advent of *Salongo* is interesting, as this could suggest that the MPR was attempting to counterbalance the influence of the Catholic church in rural areas, but failed in that regard because *Salongo*, seen here as service for the regime was not as popular as service for the Catholic church.

Thus, in short, the case study of the JMPR shows that, using our framework of nation-building, loyalty to the ideals of Mobutism was principally fostered through the educational system, and membership here was involuntary since all Zaireans automatically became members of the MPR at birth, and the younger generation would automatically become acquainted with the JMPR in the public school system. This school system would then also instruct them with a behavioral code, helping them to differentiate between right and wrong. Strikingly, however, attending public school seemingly was not compulsory, given the low rate of enrollment referred to earlier in this thesis. Therefore, it was key for the Mobutu regime to extend its grip over the educational system as much as possible. The most prominent example of this is the transformation of the Catholic University of Lovanium into the secular Université Nationale du Zaire in August 1971. On top of that, Mobutu ordered in December 1971 that JMPR branches had to be established in all seminaries across the country, thereby using the JMPR as a tool to win terrain at the expense of the Catholic church.[62]

The role that Mobutu attributed to himself in the nation-building process also merits special attention. At times, Mobutu did not per see seek to compete with the Catholic church for influence, but rather he sought to completely eclipse and replace the Catholic church, as evidenced by this historical piece from TIME Magazine: "In building his new cult, Mobutu has gone so far as to ban Christmas as a national holiday. Some followers even printed hymns in newspapers that substituted Mobutu's name for that of Jesus Christ. In December the state press agency announced that the

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[61] Ibid., 429.

[62] Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 67-8.

nation's single political party "must henceforth be considered as a church, and its founder a messiah."[63] Further evidence for this is presented in a state radio broadcast from 1972, which told listeners that ""the party [MPR] and not religion should inspire the people" and that the people should believe in the MPR and not the Catholic church."[64] In research done by Schatzberg among bureaucrats in Zaire, asking them what characteristics a leader should possess, it was concluded that "paternal authority is an idealized model for exemplary bureaucratic behavior in Zaire. A father is a teacher — he instructs; he is a repository of moral virtue — he is sociable, listens to opinions, and cares for those under his control…"[65] While this description is not entirely applicable to Mobutu and the leadership of the MPR, his personal association with a Messianic figure undoubtedly assisted him in gaining national recognition as *the* man to take Zaire forward, making it seemingly impossible for him to do wrong.

Kimbanguism: the dark horse?

Another religious movement that should be studied here is Kimbanguism, or the *Église de Jésus Christ sur la Terre par le Prophète Simon Kimbangu* (Church of Jesus Christ on Earth through the Prophet Simon Kimbangu). This movement traces its roots to the colonial era, having been founded in 1921 by catechist Simon Kimbangu, and remains popular to this day, with approximately 10 percent of the contemporary Congolese population declaring itself to be professed believers of this strand of Christianity.[66] In characterizing Kimbanguism as a religion and its place on the Congolese/Zairean religious plane, Van Reybrouck describes it at "an African form of imported faith", since it sought to distance itself from precolonial religious customs and practices

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[63] "Religion: Mobutu as Messiah", *TIME Magazine*, accessed February 4, 2018, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,917135,00.html.

[64] Thomas M. Callaghy, *The State-Society Struggle: Zaire in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 305.

[65] Michael G. Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 74.

[66] Van Reybrouck, *Congo*, 142.

related to witchcraft but still advocated traditional healing methods for the sick. Furthermore, Simon Kimbangu himself was not per se known for spreading anti-colonial rhetoric, but the colonial authorities still sought to halt the growth of the Kimbanguist church at every turn.[67] By the time Mobutu was in charge, however, the tables were turned, as here the Kimbanguist church would enjoy a relative degree of freedom, and was one of the few religious denominations that were officially recognized by the MPR, next to Catholicism and Protestantism. The fact that Kimbanguism was 'homegrown', as opposed to the Catholic church with its foreign roots that Mobutu so detested, is a probable explanation for the fact that it was not antagonized as much during the dictator's reign. On the contrary, the leadership of the Kimbanguist church was actually on good terms with Mobutu, as the latter visited several Kimbanguist schools and social centers during the height of tensions with the Catholic church in 1975, in order to show how pleased he was with the cooperation between the regime and the movement.[68] Among the Zairean people living under the Mobutu regime, the Kimbanguist church was also popular because "Social services offered through church channels, in the education and health fields, have retained their quality, in contrast to those of the state. Kimbanguist, Protestant, and Catholic churches have remained free of the taint of corruption which affected the state. While the churches have not been channels to power and influence, they have offered status and security."[69] This does not necessarily set the Kimbanguist church apart from the Catholic church, but the fact that the former was condoned by the MPR definitely assisted it in flourishing; it would therefore be appropriate to call the Kimbanguist church a dark horse.

From a nation-building perspective, Kimbanguism is one of the few denominations to cause a certain sense of divisiveness in Zaire, and this can be traced back to its linguistic foundations.

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[67] Ibid., 148.

[68] Callaghy, *State-Society Struggle*, 308.

[69] Young and Turner, *Rise and Decline*, 121.

MacGaffey has undertaken a study of the Kimbanguist church in the city of Kisangani in the 1980s, and found that

> The Church in Kisangani speaks Lingala, which began to be widely spoken in the city only during the 1950s. It is the language of those who work in inferior capacities for the government; it is the language of commerce in Kinshasa, and of those who come from the west and are regarded as foreigners by the local population (Lokele and others), whose own lingua franca is Swahili. The Lokele, within the Church as in the city at large, resent what they see as foreign control of 'their city', and this resentment is linked to the specifically political appeal of Kimbanguism in the post-war period.[70]

Furthermore, MacGaffey also concludes that "Discussion of ethnic rivalries during and after the foundation of the Church is related to the content of oral traditions, which represent several political tendencies."[71] Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, it can be concluded that for the nation-building project, Kimbanguism by far did not reach the same political appeal as did the Catholic church and the MPR, albeit the latter one can be characterized as an imposed top-down approach.

The Kimbanguist church gives off the impression of being a well-organized movement, as under the 'patronage' of Mobutu's regime, they installed a specialized secretariat and a ruling council of thirty-two pastors, all of whom were chosen by the Supreme Head of the church, who by this time was Simon Kimbangu's son, Diangienda.[72] While the aforementioned linguistic issue might cause a different result in practice, it should be noted that the Kimbanguist church does not focus on one language group in particular. Materials to spread public awareness of the movement, for instance, are widely disseminated in various language. Furthermore, radio broadcasts focus on the African character of the church, in the hopes of attracting followers through the movement's Congolese background. It is said that the leader of the church is revered like a king and is the absolute ruler over all followers, in a strange parallel to the way Mobutu was the absolute ruler (or 'messiah') of Zaire. If, for the purposes of this paper, we hold the Catholic church, the MPR, and the

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[70] Wyatt MacGaffey, "The Implantation of Kimbanguism in Kisangani, Zaire", in *The Journal of Modern African History* 23, no. 3 (1982): 393.

[71] Ibid., 394.

[72] Sundkler and Steed, *History of the Church*, 968.

Kimbanguist church as components that each contribute to the Zairean nation-building process, then this calls into question whether the element of a strong leadership is essential in each of these different components. The Kimbanguist church also imposes upon its followers a strict code of conduct: "Members must not engage in polygamy. Members of the Kimbanguist church must not use tobacco, hemp, and they must abstain from alcoholic drinks. They must not eat pork or monkey. Members are also urged to pay taxes promptly, and respect must be shown to those in authority. Love is preached quite often, and members are urged to love all, irrespective of race or color."[73] Again, the element of authority returns in this passage on code of conduct, from which we may deduct that leadership is essential to the church's survival as an influence on Zairean nation-building.

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[73] Deji Ayegboyin and S. Ademola Ishola, "African Indigenous Churches — Chapter Fifteen: the Kimbanguist Church", *Institute for Religious Research*, accessed February 6, 2018, http://irr.org/african-indigenous-churches-chapter-fifteen.

The post-Mobutu era: reflections on contemporary Congo

When Mobutu Sese Seko was finally deposed in 1997, after a reign that lasted thirty-two years, he left Zaire ravaged and penniless. After all, in the history books, Mobutu's totalitarian dictatorship is now described as the archetypal regime in areas such as clientelism, cronyism, corruption, nepotism, and embezzlement of state funds. However, to say that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the name the country reassumed after Mobutu's departure, is now better off, would also be a false assumption. In 1997, Mobutu's regime was toppled by Laurent-Désiré Kabila from the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Zaire* (AFDL; or Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire in English), and after being assassinated by one of his bodyguards in 2001, Kabila senior was succeeded as president by his son, Joseph Kabila. Both Kabilas had a stake in the Second Congo War, which raged in the east of the country until 2003, but the flickering embers of the conflict are still felt in the region ever since. The conflict was largely a byproduct of the Kabila's victory march towards Kinshasa, as it started in the east of the country, and received considerable support from troops hailing from Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi.

In discussing the conflicts that still endanger peace and stability in the DRC today, two conflicts in particular merit our attention, namely the Ituri conflict and the Kivu conflict, both of which take place in the east of the country. Both conflicts were sparked in the aftermath of the Second Congo War, and it is the Kivu conflict that will be discussed in more detail below. One of the principal victims of the Second Congo War and the Kivu conflict were (and still are) the Banyamulenge people living in the general Kivu area. While being Congolese, these people had Tutsi origins, the ethnic group that Kabila had ordered his soldiers from the AFDL to fight against. The hostile attitude against the Banyamulenge thus serves as a telltale to evaluate the successes and — in this case specifically — the failures of the Zairean/Congolese nation-building endeavor. In the end, despite the low-level ethnic conflicts that still plague the Congo, the sense of national

solidarity has not completely evaporated. To that end, this section of the thesis will investigate why that is the case and what is left of the sense of 'Zaireanness' that Mobutu has aimed to instill the population with through Mobutism and *Authenticité*. Lastly, this section will also analyze what influence the Catholic church and other religious actors still have on the nation-building process in contemporary Congo.

Ethnic strife in the east

Over the course of his reign, Mobutu was already forced to deal with influxes of refugees coming in from Rwanda and Burundi. As a result of this, a Kinyarwanda-speaking minority began to form in the east, and they were not exactly welcomed by the local population. Mobutu sought to resolve these tensions by issuing the Citizenship Decree in 1972, by which refugees that had entered Zaire from Rwanda in the period between 1959 and 1963 were given Zairean citizenship. With the General Property Law introduced in 1973, which catered for the nationalization of all land and its redistribution among certain Zairean citizens, "the more prosperous among the Kinyarwanda-speaking population cashed in on their newly acquired citizenship to gain property rights. … To many in Kivu Province, the 1972 Citizenship Decree came to symbolize not simply an inclusive citizenship policy but one so undiscriminating that, if followed in practice, it would surely turn Kivu into an open sanctuary for the surplus population from Rwanda and Burundi."[74] As Mobutu's chief of staff at the time was an ethnic Tutsi, the 'authentic' Zaireans of the Kivu region saw these two policies as a direct result of the Tutsis' growing influence in the state apparatus. Thus, in this instance we can observe the birth of schisms in the Kivu region, but one can also see that Mobutu undertook deliberate policy moves to sweep these tensions under the rug, so that they would not endanger the greater nation-building project.

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[74] Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 244.

According to Dunn, ethnic tensions in the Congo were first visibly exposed after Mobutu called for a Sovereign National Conference to be held in 1991 in order to discuss a more democratic future for Zaire, as it was then still known.

> Representatives from the North and South Kivu provinces in the eastern part of the country used the national conference as a forum to attack the Kinyarwanda speakers in the regions, referred to as Banyarwanda and Banyamulenge, respectively. The Kivu representatives sought to rescind the citizenship of these groups under the 1981 Zairian Nationality Act and force them to return to Rwanda and Burundi. This highlighted ongoing and complex tensions in the Great Lakes region, most of which related to issues of identity and access to land.[75]

Soon enough, this turned out to be the trigger for the start of attacks and long periods of ethnic violence. It was at this very Sovereign National Conference that the first phases of unraveling of Mobutism were seen — phases in which Mobutu even played a role himself: "By first favoring the Tutsi community, and more specifically the first generation of 'fifty-niners' [Tutsi migrants that settled in Kivu in 1959], against 'native Congolese', and then turning against them, and by declaring all Banyarwanda foreigners and denying them rights of citizenship, Mobutu sowed the seeds of his own undoing."[76]

During his time in power, Laurent-Désiré Kabila did not exactly portray himself as a 'president of the people'. Here, the parallel with Mobutu is drawn in the sense that "both accessed power with the help of the West, but against the will of the many people. A popular saying is that there is 'Mobutism without Mobutu' in the country nowadays."[77] Indeed, he would rely a lot on support from abroad rather than attempting to gain domestic support. The only rhetoric device he employed to take a shot at winning this domestic support was to publicly declare himself the liberator of the Congo. Furthermore, he added gasoline to the fire of linguistic issues still present in

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[75] Kevin C. Dunn, "A Survival Guide to Kinshasa: Lessons of the Father, Passed Down to the Son", in *The African Stakes of the Congo War*, ed. John F. Clark (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 55.

[76] René Lemarchand, *The Dynamics of Violence in Central Africa* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 228.

[77] Meike J. de Goede, "'Mundele, It Is Because of You' — History, Identity and the Meaning of Democracy in the Congo", *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 53, no. 4 (2015): 601.

the Congo by calling Lingala (the language spoken in Kinshasa) a dirty language, and preferring to deliver his political speeches in Swahili with an interpreter by his side.[78] With his alienation of the Tutsi living in the east, Kabila's conception of the Congolese identity "shifted away from a pluralistic, anti-Mobutu foundation to one of shared ethnic hostilities."[79] Perhaps the epitome of this was the "wanton killing of hundreds of Banyamulenge in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi in the wake of the 1998 war when the Kabila government declared open season on them."[80] In this instance, the Banyamulenge were framed by the state media as forming a Hamitic threat to the Bantu people, in reference to their ancestral origins. On top of that, the Kabila government never forgave the Banyamulenge for turning Kivu into a colony of neighboring Rwanda.[81]

It must be said, however, that around the end of the 1990s, the Banyamulenge community broke off its ties with the Rwandan government, as it felt it had been used by the regime during the Second Congo War, and refused to accede to the government's call to return en masse to Rwanda.[82] Again, this could be seen as an action on behalf of the Banyamulenge community where they consciously choose to put their Congolese identity over their Rwandan heritage, despite the fact that this was driven by occurrences on the battlefield. 'Native' Congolese, however, are to this day still convinced that if given the choice, the Tutsi Congolese would side with Rwanda.[83]

The Catholic church and other religious actors: salvagers of the nationalist ideal?

The facts above paint the picture of a nation in distress and despair. Despite the continuous ethnic strife, the glue that holds the Democratic Republic of the Congo together is still strong —

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[78] Clark, *African Stakes*, 60-1.

[79] Ibid., 67.

[80] Lemarchand, *Dynamics of Violence*, 237.

[81] Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 252.

[83] René Lemarchand, "Reflections on the Crisis in Eastern Congo", *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 16, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2009): 123.

what is the reason for this, and have the religious actors played a significant role in preserving it, if at all? Geopolitical intelligence platform Stratfor provides a bird's-eye view of the contemporary security situation:

> The president [Kabila junior] no doubt realizes that political security is physical security, and that staying in office increases the safety of himself and those around him from reprisal. With such a weak hand, the president has worked tirelessly to maintain a balance among the divergent interest groups that put his father in power and that undergird his own political standing. Kabila has worked to integrate militant outfits and other rebel groups into the Congolese army, but it has proved a challenging endeavor: several factions have quit the arrangement, only to rejoin when their rebellions fail. The president has responded by shuffling commanders around the country to prevent any single faction from using the military to strengthen itself. The precarious arrangement has left Kabila with a loose grip on the military, and few means of maintaining the fragile political balance of his inherently unstable country.[84]

Thus we see a clear link between nation-building and security, two areas that were kept relatively separate during Mobutu's time in power, but now that rulership over the country and its precious resources has become somewhat of a free-for-all, the two are becoming more and more intertwined. According to Court, the current status of ethnic minorities such as the Banyamulenge in the east of the DRC can be traced back to Mobutu's political agenda: "the nationalist doctrine that emerged on the eve of decolonization, although ostensibly aimed at introducing universal citizenship, instead propagated ethnic or regional nationalism and irredentism. As the ideal of citizenship receded and as ethno-nationalism took hold, the notion of 'indigeneity' became the touchstone of 'political belonging'. … Rather than resolving this tension, Mobutu's autocratic rule merely suppressed it."[85]

Looking at the role of the Catholic church, we can see that the relationship between Mobutu and this institution had swayed throughout the 1980s. The dictator managed to win some church officials over with his infamous bribes, but in the 1990s, the church would, in unison, support the democratization effort in Zaire. The 1990s marked the beginning of a new era in some ways, as

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[84] "Why the Congo is So Unstable", *Stratfor*, accessed March 20, 2018, https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/why-congo-so-unstable.

[85] Anthony Court, "The Banyamulenge of South Kivu: the 'Nationality Question'", *African Studies* 72, no. 3 (2013): 434.

Mobutu proclaimed the end of the Second Republic and the beginning of the Third Republic. He was attempting to spin the Kivu conflict in such a way that it would mean his re-entry into the international community as a dignified statesman, but the inhabitants of both North and South Kivu were suffering.

This is where the church again assumed the role it had taken on for much of the Second Republic. It gave employment, provided technical services, including radio communications and mechanical equipment, press outlets, health services, and education, as the takeover of universities by the state in 1971 had led to disastrous results.[86] Since the Kivu conflict is one with many different groups involved, all of whom represent a multitude of interests and who will stop at nothing to achieve these, the Catholic church turned out to be somewhat of a moral beacon. As Prunier writes: "Since practically everybody acted in bad faith, everybody turned to the Church to provide the moral guidance that was so sorely lacking. But the Church could not respond as a homogenous body because the bishops themselves embodied the ethnic and political divisions of the conflict."[87] After all, the clergy active in these two areas are also victims of the armies and militias roaming the Kivu region, simply based off of their ethnicity. Nonetheless, when we observe the Church's role as an impartial arbiter and look at the services it has provided, attempting to mend the wounds of the long-lasting civil war, one could argue that it still plays its part in the nation-building process. From the perspective of the Church, ethnicity is irrelevant, but it is exactly this ethnic question that still stands at the core of the hostilities, and thereby severely hampers the road to unity.

Internationally proposed solutions for the DRC's problems have included a move towards Balkanization, whereby the country would be split up in different smaller territories in an attempt to resolve ethnic and politico-military issues. Within the DRC, however, there has been a lot of

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[86] Gérard Prunier, "The Catholic Church and the Kivu Conflict", *Journal of Religion in Africa* 31, no. 2 (2001): 156.

[87] Ibid., 157.

opposition to this idea, and particularly the opposition that plays out along nationalist lines is interesting for the purposes of this thesis. In the words of Boyenga Bofala,

> For some time now, an instinctive call has been emerging from the people of the Congo for the defense of national unity and safeguarding of the territorial integrity of the Congo, our motherland. This unanimous call, which is an expression of a deep feeling within the heart of every Congolese, can only be explained through the historical education of a genuine patriotism, never polluted, which even at the time of forgetfulness, despite current insurmountable difficulties, makes the voice of the past speak softly, but steadily, of *building a Congo more beautiful than before* [emphasis in the original] within the borders resulting from colonization since 1885.[88]

This evidence could possibly be regarded as insubstantial, given that it is written from the perspective of a single author, but it does point to a larger truth which is supported by more sources,[89] namely that in contemporary DRC there still exists a lingering sense of nationalism that can quite likely be attributed to Mobutu. While the current leadership is just as hungry for power as its predecessors, and will only take steps to include different ethnicities within the country's bureaucratic structure once it is pressured to do so by the international community, it would seem as if it is the will of the Congolese people themselves that still holds the country together.

As far as Kimbanguism is concerned, we can be relatively brief about the religion's contemporary position in Congolese society. The record shows us that it still enjoys a large following, and since the current government no longer chastises certain religions for their influence and sway over the population, Kimbanguism no longer benefits from a beneficial standing with the authorities. Nonetheless, it continues to fulfill its primary function of bringing people together, even when the church is still mainly aimed at Kikongo speakers hailing from the southwest of the DRC.

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[88] Frédéric Boyenga Bofala, "The Attempt to Balkanize the Democratic Republic of Congo: a Revisionism of the *Uti Possidetis* Juris Principle That Is Dangerous for Africa", *Mokengeli*, accessed March 22, 2018, http://www.mokengeli.com/information-politique/the-attempt-to-balkanize-the-democratic-republic-of-congo-dangerous-for-africa/.

[89] See for instance:
Mvemba Dizolele, "Congo Is Too Big to Fail", *Foreign Policy*, accessed March 24, 2018, http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/09/03/congo-is-too-big-to-fail/;
Firoze Manji and Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, "Balkanization and Crisis in Eastern Congo", *Pambazuka News*, accessed March 24, 2018, https://www.pambazuka.org/governance/balkanisation-and-crisis-eastern-congo;
"Balkanization of the Congo Protested", *America Magazine — the Jesuit Review*, accessed March 24, 2018, https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/5147/signs/balkanization-congo-protested.

This is emblematic of the different churches' societal role in the DRC, and it would therefore be justified to call the churches the salvagers of the nationalist ideal.

Conclusion

In spite of the grand designs a dictator the likes of Mobutu Sese Seko may have for his country, the famous saying "absolute power corrupts absolutely" still holds true. The statistics speak in favor of a profitable future for the DRC, but it is the political and military situation on the ground that keeps on standing in the way of these statistics fulfill their potential. Mobutu's extensive reign is characterized by patronage, corruption, and bribery, all of which contributed to the destruction of the Zairean economy. The ideology of Mobutism, along with the program of *Authenticité*, is often mentioned in the same negative light. While it was certainly radical in its aims, it did instill the Zaireans with a sense of what it meant to be Zairean, and assisted in building a vision that Zaire could survive on its own, without help or intervention from abroad. In this, the Mobutu regime did have a competitor in the form of the Catholic church. In order to combat the criticism the Catholic church often issued in the direction of the regime, the MPR was often elevated to the level of a church in the political discourse, and Mobutu was portrayed as its messiah. In collaboration with the JMPR, which as a youth wing served to inculcate the young Zairean minds with the lessons of Mobutism, Mobutu and his party created a totalitarian state that, in the end, laid a decisive fundament in the construction of a Zairean identity.

It was the Catholic church, however, that was far more effective in providing service to the people who need it most. Perhaps one of the only positive legacies of the colonial era, the Church by far outperformed the state in areas such as health and education, and still continues to do so. Mobutu's reign came to an end in 1997, but the Church continues still plays a role of vital importance in the Congo as a whole, and particularly in the Kivu area, where conflict may once again erupt on any given day. Mobutu was in some ways jealous of the efficacy of the Church, evidenced by his struggle to shut it down, but the fact that the Church already had a large base of believers before the start of his dictatorial reign was quite likely a factor of importance in Mobutu's failure to close the Church for good. Interestingly enough, the Kimbanguist church, did not follow

the same trajectory. One would be mistaken to believe that Mobutu undertook an offensive against all forms of religion. As he sought to root out any foreign influence on Zairean culture with *Authenticité*, he deemed the Kimbanguist church to be authentically Zairean from the outset, which assisted its survival throughout the years. While in contemporary Congo, its believers are mostly concentrated within a certain areas of the country, its societal impact is still enormous. The same goes for the Catholic church, which still enjoys a lot of visibility and popularity, and will continue to unite Catholic Congolese, regardless of their ethnicity, in the foreseeable future. According to Manson, "In Congo, people put far more faith in churches — of which there are probably hundreds … — than they do in the state. They are the heart of culture, authority, and sometimes politics in the country."[90]

The concept of ethnicity stands at the core of modern-day strifes such as the Kivu conflict and the Ituri conflict, with each side harboring notorious war criminals that seemingly make a peaceful future impossible. As for the politico-military details, many sensible solutions have been proposed, for instance by Orogun, who writes that "the panacea to the Congolese crisis lies in the domain of the politics of ethnic accommodation, political pluralism, and decentralization of power from the central government to provincial administrations. Power-sharing, federalism, restoration of civil society, and demilitarization of the body politic are crucial for a lasting peace and the return of political stability to the DRC."[91] The popular opinion in the DRC is still against the end-all solution proposed by the international community, namely that of Balkanization. Based off of this, we may infer that the idea of a unified DRC still overrides the singular ethnicities of the warring parties. The Zairean/Congolese identity can, in this regard, be likened to an elastic band: it will stretch when conflict arises, but it will never snap. It remains difficult, however, to ascertain whether Mobutism

[90] Katrina Manson, "Sounds of Kinshasa: Music, Dance, and Culture Are a Lifeline in Congo", *Financial Times*, accessed March 22, 2018, https://www.ft.com/content/7b4c7348-2e40-11e4-b760-00144feabdc0.

[91] Paul S. Orogun, "Crisis of Government, Ethnic Schisms, Civil War, and Regional Destabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo", *World Affairs* 165, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 26.

or the churches had a stronger influence in the identity formation process. At the very least, both Mobutism and the Catholic church can be credited for still holding the nation together, and preventing it from becoming a definitive failed state.

	1900	1950	1965	1980	2000
Total population	118	222	306	450	770
Total Christians	4	34	75	146	351
Roman Catholic	1	14	34	71	175
Protestants	1	9	21	45	110
Orthodox-Coptic	2	8	13	17	32
African Independents	0	3	7	13	34

Appendix 1. Growth of the churches in Africa over time as a proportion of the total population (numbers in millions). Adapted from: Bengt Sundkler and Christopher Steed, *A History of the Church in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 906.

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