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Lumumba's Ghost: An Appreciation of Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the Congo Crisis

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Lumumba's Ghost

An Appreciation of Nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the Congo Crisis

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Timeline

February 26th, 1885: King Leopold formally acquires the Congo Free State at the Berlin Conference.

October 18th, 1908: The Belgian parliament, bowing to international pressure, takes over the Congo from King Leopold.

October 5th, 1958: The *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC) is founded as one of the few national movements calling for Congolese independence.

January 13th, 1959: King Baudouin announces the willingness of Belgium to grant the Congo independence.

January 27th, 1960: After being held in prison for months, Lumumba is freed, and he attends the roundtable in Brussels where the terms of independence are negotiated.

May 31st, 1960: The MNC wins the first Congolese elections.

June 30th, 1960: Independence is officially proclaimed and Lumumba, now prime minister, pronounces his famous independence speech.

July 5th, 1960: Soldiers of the Congolese army protest the resistance of the Belgian officers to the Africanization of the Congolese army.

July 11th, 1960: Supported by Belgian troops, the resource-rich region of Katanga secedes from the Congo.

September 5th, 1960: President Kasa-Vubu strips Lumumba of his position as prime minister.

September 14th, 1960: Colonel Mobutu enacts his first coup d'état and suspends the Congolese parliament.

November 27th, 1960: Lumumba flees his home to travel to Stanleyville to join the nationalist forces gathering there under Antoine Gizenga.

December 2nd, 1960: Lumumba is caught and imprisoned by Congolese troops.

January 17th, 1961: Under the complicit eye of Belgian officials, Lumumba is transferred to Katanga and executed.

February 13th, 1961: After much speculation, the death of Lumumba is formally announced over Katangan radio.

Introduction

On June 20th, 2022, the Belgian government returned a gold-capped tooth to the family of Patrice Lumumba, attempting to bring his tortuous tale, which began more than sixty years ago on the eve of Congolese independence, to an end. The tooth is the only body part of Lumumba that was kept by a Belgian police officer, Gerard Soete. Soete and his brother exhumed and dissolved his corpse in sulfuric acid to erase the last traces of his assassination in 1961. Only in 2016, sixteen years after Soete's death and more than half a century after Lumumba's death, the tooth was confiscated from his daughter's house; six years later, the tooth was finally given a proper burial by Lumumba's family. Belgium has only begun to examine its colonial history in the last few decades, and there is much to unravel still. The story of the first Congolese prime minister, a debacle of racial discrimination and political schemes, remains as relevant and topical as ever.¹

A line roams through the bloodstained history of the Congo, from today's conflicts and economic problems in the DRC through the 30-year dictatorial regime of Joseph Mobutu and all the way back to the 30th of June of 1960 when the Congo gained independence from Belgium. On that day, Patrice Lumumba, the first Congolese Prime Minister, stood in front of the Belgian King and his government and called out the injustice and cruelty of the eighty-year pillage of the Congo by the Belgians.² Since his death in 1961, Lumumba's assassination has been cross-examined many times, but less emphasis and attention has been given to his short political career. Through an analysis of the writings of Lumumba, this thesis seeks to enhance Lumumba's impact on the Congo and his enduring legacy that is still felt today.

The life and death of Patrice Lumumba

Patrice Lumumba's accelerated rise to political significance proves how much support the nationalist movement garnered between the creation of the MNC (*Mouvement National Congolais*) in 1958 and when Belgium granted the Congo independence in June 1960. Within a few weeks after independence, he was being watched not only by the Belgian officials in the Congo, but also by US President Eisenhower, Director of the CIA Allen Dulles, and UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld among others. Lumumba was popular in his home country, but more than

¹ Imani Perry, "A Grisly Souvenir of Global Oppression," *The Atlantic*, June 22, 2022. <https://newsletters.theatlantic.com/unsettled-territory/62b5e2e3ebf53e0022cb6944/congo-patrice-lumumba-assassination-tooth/>

² Sara Kendall. "Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities: Congolese Sovereignty and the Murder of Patrice Lumumba," In *International Law and the Cold War*, ed. Matthew Craven, Sundhya Pahuja and Gerry Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 558.

anything he was controversial. The international actors looking on as Congolese independence unfolded accused Lumumba of being a communist and a repressive leader. Before he was able to implement real change, the man was already condemned.³

Six months after independence, on January 17th, 1961, Lumumba and two of his closest advisors were assassinated in the seceded province of Katanga. His death induced unrest and protests around the world: the death of a newly elected, freely-chosen leader of a decolonized nation fueled anger directed at colonial powers.⁴ Lumumba was effectively martyred as the leader that colonial powers could not accept and thus had to eliminate. The nationalist movement in the Congo lost its biggest proponent, and Belgium maintained its grip on the country.

What did Lumumba's political career look like? Who assassinated Lumumba? Who was pulling the levers in the attempts to smear Lumumba's reputation, hinder him from participating in politics, and eventually physically eliminate him? The answers to these questions are far from straightforward. Patrice Lumumba, however, was not only the Congolese prime minister who was murdered by the Belgian government. He was not just the martyr of Pan-Africanism, the movement seeking to unite all Africans.⁵ Lumumba expressed a precise vision for the independence he wanted for the Congo; independence free from the Belgian colonial regime and allied with all other African nations seeking freedom.

In historical scholarship, many studies cover Lumumba's death. These works connect his demise to the unwillingness of Belgium to let go of its former colony, to the Cold War split which dictated international diplomacy in the 20th century, and to the political failures of Lumumba himself. As of now, there is less material examining the life and legacy of Lumumba, exploring the essence of the prime minister's political career beyond the polar opposites of erratic demagogue and Pan-African hero. As such, this thesis is devoted to shedding light on the essence of Lumumba's political thought, and to revealing why he failed to enact his political vision.

The events of the first phase of the Congo Crisis have been analyzed through a myriad of lenses in recent years.⁶ There are endless layers to peel off and reveal more complexity and nuance to the crisis. Until recently, the Cold War framework was the primary explanation for what motivated international actors such as the United States, Belgium, and the United Nations in their opposition to Lumumba and support for more Western-friendly politicians. A recent wave of

³ James H Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 209.

⁴ Pedro Monaville, *Students of the World*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2022), 116-117.

⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Préface," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), XLIV.

⁶ The first phase of the Congo Crisis is generally defined as the period between the independence of the Congo (June 30th, 1960) and the death of Patrice Lumumba (January 17th, 1961).

literature, championed by scholars such as Anne-Sophie Gijs, Frank Gerits, and Pedro Monaville amongst others, has attempted to expand on the Cold War outlook by identifying the effort of nationalists and Pan-Africanists to create a third political space in the communist-capitalist reality of the 20th century.⁷ This thesis builds on this new current of literature, expanding the motives and beliefs analyzed beyond the hostile competitive nature of the Cold War.

A deeper look at Lumumba's political thought through his own words can reveal truths about Congolese nationalism, Pan-Africanism, and anticolonialism as embodied by one of its symbols from the 1960s. In this thesis, I focus on the development of Lumumba's political thought in the years before his assassination. This thesis examines Lumumba's own writings to strip away the historical narrative tied to the first Congolese prime minister. Through the study of these primary sources, I wish to reveal Lumumba's values in the context of the Congo Crisis and how his political thought contrasted with the intentions of global powers in the Congo in 1960.

Research structure

The research question I explore in this thesis is the following: What prevented Lumumba from enacting his political vision during the Congo Crisis? The question is answered through the following structure.

In this introduction, I have introduced the topic and spelled out the main research objectives. Second, in the literature review I summarize the main scholarly debates around Lumumba's political thought and the Congo Crisis, focusing particularly on highlighting the gaps in the historical narrative this thesis seeks to address. Third, I delineate the methods I followed to conduct research and attain the objectives stated above.

Then, I head into the main body of the thesis, which expresses my main arguments through an analysis of Lumumba's political position throughout the Congo Crisis. The main body is split up into three main chapters. The first chapter focuses on the evolution of Lumumba's political thought from 1956 until 1960 and the main aspirations he articulated once he became prime minister. The second chapter places Lumumba's thought in the context of Congolese independence and the Congo Crisis, homing in on other crucial Congolese actors (such as Tshombe, Kasa-Vubu, and Mobutu) as well as international players (such as the US government, the Belgian authorities, and the UN). The third and final chapter is centered around the demise of Lumumba and his long-lasting legacy. The conclusion underscores that Lumumba's ideological

⁷ Anne-Sophie Gijs, *Le pouvoir de l'absent : les avatars de l'anticommunisme au Congo (1920-1961). Volume 2*. (Bruxelles: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2016); Frank Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa: How the Pursuit of Anticolonial Modernity Shaped a Postcolonial Order, 1945-1966*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023); Monaville, *Students of the World*.

independence was dreaded by Westerners. Additionally, it draws a link to the present and poses the questions that remain open for further research.

Literature Review

Countless studies and reports have been published on the Congo and its colonization by Belgium, from Edmund Dene Morel's study exposing the atrocities committed in the rubber slave trade under King Leopold II's Congo Free State to recent monographs such as Pedro Monaville's *Students of the World* offering a transnational analysis of the Congo Crisis and the political movements that bloomed during this chaotic period. Reviewing the available literature allows us to identify the approach and position of this thesis within the existing scholarly debates.

The literature review is composed of three sections, which progressively narrow their focus on Patrice Lumumba. The first section discusses the internal and external aspects of the Congo Crisis. The second section envelops the conversations around the political thought of Lumumba. The third section compares the appraisals of Lumumba's actions in 1960-61. The fourth section sets forth the historical gaps this thesis focuses on.

The Congo in crisis

Right before the Congo gained independence, the colony produced an enormous amount of precious resources, including 69 percent of the West's industrial diamonds.⁸ Belgium did not wish to lose these assets, which gave its small country an important role in international politics. When King Baudouin declared, in a 1959 radio speech, that Congo would eventually be given its independence, many were surprised. Was Belgium resigned to losing its great colony?

According to Matthew Stanard, it was not resignation that drove the Belgians to hand independence to the Congolese people so suddenly. Belgium saw the war the Algerians were fighting with the French and wished to avoid being stuck in a similar nightmare. The colonial structures in place for decades had severely limited the opportunities granted to the Congolese to develop their country. The Belgians wished for independence only by name, whilst keeping Belgian interests, businesses, advisors, and influence just as they were.⁹ Guy Vanthemsche seems to agree with this interpretation. According to the Belgian historian, the corruption and lack of leadership skills seen in the Congolese political leaders in 1960 should not come as a surprise.

⁸ William Mountz, "The Congo Crisis: A Reexamination (1960–1965)," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 5, no. 2, (2014): 152.

⁹ Matthew Stanard, "Après Nous, Le Déluge: Belgium, Decolonization, and the Congo," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Ends of Empire*, ed. Martin Thomas and Andrew S. Thompson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 156.

Belgium purposely did not give training to African leaders, which contributed to the chaos the Congolese administration soon found itself in.¹⁰

The hardships of Congo's decolonization started during the Congo Crisis, only a few days after the Congolese declaration of independence on June 30th, 1960. Lumumba's election as Prime Minister of the former colony brought all eyes to him. Colonial powers pondered what would change with the rise of the Congolese leader. Driven by the doubt over Lumumba's loyalties, colonial powers were willing to intervene in Congolese politics more than once. These interventions were often aimed at replacing Lumumba with a more pro-Western leader. Sara Kendall states that, through the CIA, the US attempted to execute several action programs to remove Lumumba from power.¹¹

Undermining the newly elected Congolese Prime Minister did not prove to be easy. There was no concrete evidence of his corruption, no effective bribery, and no explicit links with the Eastern Bloc. In other words, there was no easy way to sabotage Lumumba's exemplary image. However, many scholars agree on the fact that US officials remained determined to discredit Lumumba, even if this meant resorting to personal attacks and covert operations. Roger Housen explains that the US government was driven by a deep fear of African nationalism, which Lumumba strongly promoted.¹² Ludo De Witte describes how Allen Dulles, director of the CIA in 1960, went so far as to compare Patrice Lumumba to Fidel Castro, a symbol of the constant threat of communist expansion in Third World countries. Scholars such as Gerard, Kuklick, and De Witte view American interference in the Congo as unjustified, as it maintained an unequal power relationship between colonial powers and newly independent countries.

The motivations that led US officials to infringe on the Congo's sovereignty are debated among historians. In *Death in the Congo*, Gerard and Kuklick argue that President Eisenhower was afraid the Soviet Union might test the strength of the Western alliance at any point. If this happened, the US "needed to have a united front."¹³ Thus, the US justified its undercover missions as a lesser evil that kept the worst evil (i.e. communism) at bay. According to the scholars, the Cold War conflict was a core component of what prompted the US officials to meddle in Congolese politics: if the alternative was civilization-ending nuclear war, the US had to pay a small moral

¹⁰ Guy Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo, 1885–1980*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 214-215. The reliance of the Congo on Belgium never went both ways. Belgium and the Congo remained decidedly separate from each other. Vanthemsche speaks of this as a phenomenon common to all former colonial powers, representing the inequality between "the 'center' and the 'periphery'."

¹¹ Kendall, "Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities," 545.

¹² Roger T. Housen, "Why Did the US Want to Kill Prime Minister Lumumba of the Congo," National War College, 2002.

¹³ Emmanuel Gerard and Bruce Kuklick, *Death in the Congo : Murdering Patrice Lumumba*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015), 70.

price to find its way around a direct confrontation with the USSR. Matthew Stanard follows the same argument by reminding us that the atomic bombs dropped on Japan during WWII were produced with uranium extracted in Katanga. The importance of this material and the American fear that the Soviets might bomb or seize Katanga's mines increased their desire to place an anticommunist leader at the head of the Congolese government.¹⁴ Democratic ideals could be ignored, and the sovereignty of the Congo could be violated, as it was in the name of world peace.

Other historians view the matter differently. Jonathan Cole contends that American policymakers projected racial stereotypes of cultural backwardness and irrationality on the Congolese people. These stereotypes validated their criticisms of an independent African state, through which the US sought to keep the Congo within its sphere of influence and bolster their role in postcolonial Africa. The US wished to see African states remain tied to their former European colonizing power, making African nations a part of the Western alliance and offering a united front in opposition to the Soviet coalition. The United States' conflict with Lumumba and other Congolese politicians was not only a proxy war between the USSR and the US, but a clash over incompatible visions of the way the world should be organized in a postcolonial era.¹⁵ William Mountz maintains that the US intervention in the Congo, which only ended with Mobutu's second *coup d'état* in 1965, represented a commitment to a narrow understanding of American liberalism. According to Mountz, The US restricted "the meanings of liberty, equality, and development to an American framework that opposed both communist alternatives and the independence desired by Congolese nationalists."¹⁶ These analyses attribute different levels of importance to the role of Cold War affairs in the Congo Crisis. This thesis seeks to move beyond the Cold War lens, seeing the Congo Crisis as the complex interaction between internal rivalries and external pressures.

A party that claimed to be neutral in the chaotic period of the Congo crisis was the United Nations, directed by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. Most international bystanders seemed to believe the UN offered the best hope for an unbiased solution to the conflicts afflicting the Congo. Pan-African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah urged the UN to back the nationalist government of Lumumba. The US and Belgium also preferred to see the Congo united; however, a pro-Western regime was their priority. This increasingly appeared to imply the removal of Lumumba as prime minister.¹⁷

¹⁴ Stanard, "Après Nous, Le Déluge," 157.

¹⁵ Cole, "The Congo Question," 28.

¹⁶ Mountz. "The Congo Crisis," 152-153.

¹⁷ Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*. 229-230.

The UN's actions always held a veneer of adherence to its charter through the protection of the Congo's sovereignty. De Witte finds Hammarskjöld's attempts to depict the UN as a neutral party unconvincing. The Belgian scholar wonders how Hammarskjöld's efforts in maintaining law and order can be reconciled with the UN's passivity in the face of violations of the country's own constitutional structures.¹⁸ The United Nations showed wildly different levels of engagement when dealing with the Katanga crisis compared to the calls for help of Lumumba. The secessionist region of Katanga offered a colossal opportunity to the Belgians to preserve their economic interests in the region, which revolved around the resource-rich province. According to De Witte, the UN willingly participated in the Belgian and American attempts to construct a neo-colonial Congo.¹⁹

In her early analysis of the first phase of the Congo Crisis, Catherine Hoskyns concludes that the United Nations' operation in the Congo was, overall, a success. The UN kept the crisis from becoming an international conflict.²⁰ This conclusion contrasts that of De Witte, who views the UN in a much more negative light. Gerard and Kuklick downplay the role of the UN, stating that "Hammarskjöld was less a kingmaker than he thought." According to the two historians, Lumumba may not have been able to retain power even with the UN's expressed approval. Still, Hammarskjöld saw himself as an enforcer of peace and discipline when he traveled to the Congo in 1960 and did what he could to undermine the government of Lumumba.²¹ When Lumumba was arrested, Hammarskjöld did not use the UN military forces to protect Lumumba or to ensure the humane treatment of the Prime Minister after his arrest. Once the matter was in the hands of Mobutu and Kasa-Vubu (even though the Belgians kept a close eye on the situation), the UN accepted Mobutu's statement that the Congolese forces had been ordered to not harm the prime minister. The failure to keep a closer eye on Lumumba shows the conflict of interests between the United Nations peacekeeping missions and its alignment with Western interests.²²

Internal political tensions and alliances were just as essential to the unfolding of the events in the Congo. Lumumba's MNC did not gain a complete majority in parliament and had to form a broad political coalition to govern the country. Of all the Congolese politicians who had an important part in the crisis, three names come up most often: Joseph Kasa-Vubu, leader of the ABAKO (*Alliance des Bakongo*) and later President of the Congo; Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, serving

¹⁸ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*, 138.

¹⁹ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*, 291-292.

²⁰ Catherine Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence, January 1960 - December 1961*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 475.

²¹ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 106.

²² Alanna O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation: America, Britain and the United Nations during the Congo*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press. 2018), 200-201.

as Chief of Staff of the Army under Lumumba; and Moïse Tshombe, leader of the secessionist movement in Katanga.

Joseph Mobutu, who later became the head of state for more than thirty years, is a debated figure among historians of the Congo Crisis. Some scholars describe his actions as a betrayal of Lumumba. They believe Mobutu was corrupted by the Western powers.²³ Belgium and the US endorsed Mobutu's take-over of the Congolese government in September 1960.²⁴ Mobutu was seen by Western powers as a figure who could establish order and who understood international diplomacy and politics better than most Congolese politicians, and who would be much easier to work with.²⁵

There are other interpretations of Mobutu's motivations and aspirations. Gerard and Kuklick offer a more nuanced understanding of the future despotic leader of the Congo. According to them, Mobutu understood that most Congolese citizens supported Lumumba. He hesitated to fully erase Lumumba's place from the Congolese political scene. Western powers "took every opportunity to buck up Mobutu and Kasa-Vubu with good words— and real money— when Mobutu showed signs of faltering, which he did almost daily."²⁶ While some see Mobutu as a corrupt, opportunistic politician who betrayed Lumumba, others paint a more complex picture, depicting Mobutu as a man with conflicting interests and ambitions who was put under a lot of pressure from international powers.

President Kasa-Vubu is an enigmatic figure, one that is always mentioned in literature about Lumumba and the Congo Crisis but whose actions and motivations are rarely scrutinized. He was named president of the Congo when Lumumba was prime minister. In De Witte's eyes, Kasa-Vubu, like Mobutu, was accepting the help of foreign powers to consolidate the position of the new government and was only restrained by the loyalty of the Congolese people in Lumumba.²⁷ Others highlight Kasa-Vubu's push for a federal Congo through the ABAKO movement. Kasa-Vubu had gathered a lot of respect and power in his localized movement. Crawford Young emphasizes that Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu differed in their rhetorical style as well as their principal aspirations.²⁸ The federalist ambition of the ABAKO clashed directly with

²³ Monaville, *Students of the World*. 140.

²⁴ Shortly after Kasa-Vubu removed Lumumba from power on September 5th, 1960, Mobutu dissolved parliament and kept Lumumba under house arrest, making himself the de facto head of state. He nominally handed power over to a group of Congolese university students, but he held the reins of the government behind the scenes.

²⁵ Gijss, *Le pouvoir de l'absent*. 446.

²⁶ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 120-121.

²⁷ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 77.

²⁸ Crawford Young, *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 390.

the MNC's plans for a united Congo and may have contributed to the tensions between Lumumba and Kasa-Vubu.²⁹

Another essential representative of the Congolese politicians who desired a federal system was Moïse Tshombe, from the region of Katanga. Tshombe strongly disliked Lumumba and after independence developed a close relationship with a few Belgian diplomats. Belgium supported Katanga when the region seceded from the sovereign state, and Tshombe sought to show the self-sufficiency of the region. It was in Katanga that Lumumba was assassinated in 1961. Many scholars still attribute the death of the ex-Prime Minister to Tshombe, even if they identify other responsible parties. Monville states that even around 1964 when Tshombe was nominated President of the Congo, many Congolese still saw him as the assassin of Lumumba.³⁰ Leo Zeilig stresses the double standard of the Western powers' judgment: on the one hand, they feared and reprimanded Lumumba for even considering the possibility of accepting help from the Soviets; on the other hand, they were blind to Tshombe's obvious reliance on Belgium's army and resources.³¹

These are only three out of the many internal actors of the Congo Crisis, but they represent crucial factions of the conflicts, and all played a role in the determination of Lumumba's fate.

The political transformation of Lumumba

Patrice Lumumba's political thought went through some major changes between 1956, the year he wrote his book, *Congo, My Country*, and 1960, the year he was elected Prime Minister of the Congo. His opposition to the Belgian colonial regime grew, and the 1958 Pan-African conference in Accra, Ghana, introduced Lumumba to Pan-Africanist thought. One aspect that did not change at this time is his strong nationalist stance. Lumumba desired to make the Congo an independent state, governing its land and people. Leo Zeilig asserts that, to Lumumba, the 'resting place for the independence struggle was in the nation-state, which occupied a space in a fiercely competitive world system.'³² De Witte describes Lumumba's nationalism as one of three pillars of his political thought; the other two are the formation of a popular political movement (embodied by the MNC) and an internationalist perspective.³³ The Congolese prime minister aspired to create a coherent nationalist mass movement, which he could always rely upon for support.

²⁹ Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo*. 91.

³⁰ Monville, *Students of the World*. 136.

³¹ Leo Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. (London: Haus Publishing, 2008) 128.

³² Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. 82.

³³ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 371.

After attending the 1958 Accra conference, Lumumba began incorporating the Pan-Africanist vision in his speeches. He saw the struggle of the Congo for independence as exemplary of the push for African independence and unity. At the height of the Congo Crisis, Kwame Nkrumah, one of the major Pan-African leaders in Africa, 'signed a secret agreement with Lumumba to establish a Union of African States'.³⁴ Lumumba's Pan-Africanist aspirations, paired with his nationalist convictions, sought to counter the balkanization of the Congo.³⁵ Even after his death, the former prime minister embodied the attempt of African leaders to articulate their vision of an independent, unified Africa pursuing African needs and desires.³⁶

Lumumba was repeatedly accused of being a communist sympathizer during his time as prime minister. Western powers, particularly the United States, feared Lumumba might become an ally to the Soviet Union. Jean Van Lierde, a friend of Lumumba and the editor of the largest collection of his speeches and letters, explained that Lumumba was not trained in communist thought. In his eyes, the notion of class struggle was a threat to the fragile national unity he had come to achieve in the Congo. Lumumba sought to unite the Congolese people under one broad movement, so he had no interest in adding the divisive concept of class to the ethnic segmentation of the Congo.³⁷ The prime minister rejected alignment with either side of the Cold War, hoping to follow a policy of positive neutralism.³⁸ Sara Kendall expresses the view that rejecting Cold War alignments and embracing positive neutralism became impossible once the Congo Crisis reached its breaking point.³⁹

The transformation of Lumumba's politics is striking. In 1956, his language and demeanor were subservient to the Belgian government, recognizing the colonization of the Congo as an attempt to civilize the "barbaric" Africans. Over the next four years, Lumumba radicalized his position and became more opposed to the policies of the Belgian colonizers.

The evaluation of Lumumba's choices

The choices Lumumba made as a prime minister are one of the most conflicting points in the assessment of the Congo Crisis. Scholars express wildly different views about Lumumba's ability as a politician and his understanding of the context he operated in. In his preface to Jean Van

³⁴ Adi, *Pan-Africanism*. 149-150.

³⁵ Balkanization refers to the fragmentation of a sovereign nation into smaller parts or regions; with movements such as the ABAKO and the CONAKAT gaining momentum, post-independence Congolese politics was characterized by a clash between separatists and nationalists.

³⁶ Cole, "The Congo Question," 27.

³⁷ Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. 47.

³⁸ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 58.

³⁹ Kendall. "Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities," 541.

Lierde's collection of Lumumba's writings, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre was one of the first to turn Lumumba into a hero of Pan-Africanism betrayed by all and doomed to fail.⁴⁰ John Henrik Clarke applauds Lumumba for fighting the "noble struggle" against colonialism and imperialism. His demand for national sovereignty is hereby seen as a genuine attempt to free the Congo from colonial domination.⁴¹ According to Ludo De Witte, the rupture between the Belgian government and Lumumba did not occur on June 30th when he pronounced his incendiary speech. A few days after the speech, when the Congolese army mutinied, Lumumba backed the soldiers' movement and announced the Africanization of the army.⁴² Once Lumumba showed that he was willing to back up his words with swift political action, the Belgian officials saw him as a threat.⁴³

Some scholars express a more negative view of Lumumba's political career. Catherine Hoskyns describes Lumumba as inexperienced and impulsive in his decisions. When the soldiers mutinied against their officers in the Force Publique, Lumumba did not swiftly stifle the protests and implement national reforms. Instead, he attempted to negotiate with them, allowing the mutiny to turn into a national crisis.⁴⁴ His speech on the day of independence is viewed by some as the confirmation Lumumba offered to the Western powers of their worst fears; he was a determined nationalist whose actions would be unpredictable and inflammatory.⁴⁵

De Witte disagrees with both of these positions. The Belgian scholar argues that Lumumba was not as isolated as many imagined him to be after his death. His assassination was joined by that of hundreds of nationalists across the Congo. The Western powers' coordination in discrediting Lumumba's position went to such an extent precisely because his national support was solid.⁴⁶ In recent assessments of the first Congolese prime minister, scholars adopt a more moderate view of Lumumba. Lumumba's figure is seen as complex, with both positives and negatives.⁴⁷ He is seen as a politician who attempted to keep the imperialists satisfied and at the

⁴⁰ Sartre, "Préface," XLIII.

⁴¹ John Henrik Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads: Notes for an African World Revolution*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991), 125.

⁴² The soldiers protested in response to the refusal of the Belgian officers (particularly the infamous commander of the Force Publique, Lieutenant-General Janssens) to promote Congolese soldiers to higher ranks as had been promised by the new government.

⁴³ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 41.

⁴⁴ Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence*. 103.

⁴⁵ Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa*. 114-115.

⁴⁶ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 368-369.

⁴⁷ Jamie Elizabeth Hickner, "'History Will One Day Have Its Say': Patrice Lumumba and the Black Freedom Movement," (PhD diss., Purdue University, 2011), 12.

same time fulfill the desires of the Congolese people.⁴⁸ Overall, Lumumba is a polarizing figure. The understanding of his choices has changed as the real involvement of Western powers in the Congo Crisis has been uncovered in recent decades. The prime minister's legacy has left a powerful imprint, creating a heroic picture of Lumumba that has lingered for decades.

Filling the gap

The Congo Crisis has been researched by many scholars over the years. Lumumba is one of the most well-known politicians from that time and his life and career are often discussed in studies concerning the Congo Crisis. This thesis seeks to delve into this topic by readjusting the historical lens in a few ways, thus addressing questions of a different nature than most previous studies.

First, the thesis is centered around the life of Patrice Lumumba, not his death. The most acclaimed and well-known books about Lumumba are primarily focused on his assassination.⁴⁹ Researching Lumumba's life through his own words can inform our understanding of his decisions and motivations during the Congo Crisis. Previous biographical books about Lumumba have adopted mostly a descriptive role, without much critical analysis or contextualization of his political thought.⁵⁰ This thesis thoroughly examines Lumumba's writings to then contextualize his thought in the socio-political landscape of the Congo Crisis.

Secondly, this thesis seeks to complicate and enlarge the narrative of the Congo Crisis beyond the Cold War framework. Previous scholars have explained the opposition Lumumba faced and the driving motivations of the other players in the Congo merely through the optic of the global clash between capitalism and communism. Recently, a new wave of scholarship is emerging that has started expanding the narrative of the crisis to other factors, such as the imperial tendencies of the US, the colonial and racist legacy of Western powers in Africa, and the internal tensions breeding in the Congo. Addressing these issues helps us understand the Congo Crisis in a new light. This thesis follows this recent wave of research in challenging the simplistic Cold War narrative.

Finally, this thesis expands on Lumumba's legacy, an aspect that is rarely explored in analyses of the Congo Crisis. Historical researchers normally focus on the events up to the death of Lumumba or shortly after. However, the legacy of Lumumba is an essential part of his political career, for two main reasons. First, the memory of Lumumba is inseparable from the heroic image

⁴⁸ Bill Vann, "The unquiet death of Patrice Lumumba." World Socialist Web Site. January 16, 2002. <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2002/01/lumu-j16.html>.

⁴⁹ Primarily De Witte's *L'assassinat de Lumumba* and Gerard and Kuklick's *Death in the Congo*.

⁵⁰ See Zeilig's *Patrice Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*.

that was created of him post-mortem. The first prime minister's death led to a martyrization that has polarized the historical narrative of Lumumba. Some view Lumumba as a great leader who tirelessly fought for independence, others as an inexperienced, inept character who failed the Congolese nation in its first steps. There is not much grey area in the depiction of Lumumba, which in turn molds the historical narrative around the Congolese prime minister. In this case, as in many others, the current narrative affects our historical memory of events and persons. Thus, it is essential to split the legacy of Lumumba from his political thought and actions as prime minister. Secondly, the historical significance of Lumumba is partially dictated by the lasting impact he has had on international politics, anticolonial activism, and Black freedom movements. Through the analysis of the social and cultural commemorations of Lumumba, this thesis emphasizes the relevance of historical research on Lumumba that remains up to this day.

The literature review laid out the research and scholarly debates on the Congo Crisis and Patrice Lumumba and articulated the research gaps this thesis aims to address. The following chapter outlines the principal components of the political thought of Lumumba, delving into Lumumba's own writings to extract his ideas.

Methodology

There is no lack of research and literature on the Congo Crisis and on Patrice Lumumba. In fact, the difficulty is rather to find and choose the most useful material amongst the profusion of studies on the topic. This thesis consists of source-driven research focusing on Lumumba's writings to examine his political thought and his long-lasting influence.

The first section of this chapter chronicles what was my research methods: the sources I looked at, which archives I visited, and the steps I took in the process of writing this thesis. The second section provides the rationale for the method I used. The third section lists the potential limitations of my method.

Description

As I stated above, primary literature formed the crux of the thesis. Since Patrice Lumumba was the focal point of my research question, his writings, speeches and anything else left behind by the Congolese prime minister are the foundation of this thesis. His only published book, *Congo, My Country*, was studied for the thesis but cited conservatively, as Lumumba wrote the manuscript around 1956, and the book is not fully representative of the ideas Lumumba carried when he was elected prime minister.⁵¹ The most important source for this thesis was undoubtedly the collection of Lumumba's speeches, letters, and actions put together by Jean Van Lierde and prefaced by Jean-Paul Sartre, *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, published in 1963. I attentively studied Lumumba's speeches throughout his political career and his communication with other political figures in the Congo to identify the milestones of his career and the defining ideas he adopted once he became prime minister. Due to the popularity of Patrice Lumumba in recent years, many of his speeches and letters have also become available digitally, especially his speech on Congolese independence from June 30th and the last letter to his wife, Pauline.

The archives I visited for this thesis are the archives of the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brussels and the archives of the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren (Belgium). I spent a week of research at the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and had a day of research at the Royal Museum for Central Africa. Regarding the former, the documents used are the telegrams received and sent in Leopoldville, Elisabethville, and Brazzaville, newspapers from 1960 and 1961, and speeches made by US officials regarding the events of the Congo Crisis. Regarding the latter, I found relevant and useful newspaper articles, particularly around the time

⁵¹ Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. 56.

of Lumumba's death and the protests that followed. I was able to study most of these sources in their original French language, although a few were provided with English translations. Altogether, these sources provide insight into who the decision-makers were in the Congo in 1960 and how they spoke of Lumumba at the time.

The primary sources I collected for this thesis are complemented by the secondary literature I used to gain knowledge about the Congo Crisis and look at the analysis of the events of other scholars. The researchers used a variety of perspectives to study the Congo Crisis and Patrice Lumumba: from the lens of the global Cold War conflict to the study of the UN's neutralism in the process of decolonization; from a biographical account of Lumumba's life to a grueling tale of his assassination. This diversity of approaches helped me understand the complexity of the crisis and the number of factors that went into the unfolding of history. To analyze the legacy of Lumumba I looked at popular art for the section "Lumumba in the arts" to overcome to examine the cultural narrative constructed around Lumumba and its evolution over the years. For this, I looked at songs, paintings, movies, and documentaries created in the decades after Lumumba's death.

In addition to reading the works of these researchers, I was able to hold interviews with several of them, asking them questions about the Congo Crisis and Patrice Lumumba or developing their points further. After studying the secondary literature, I picked some of the authors whose work I found insightful or interesting and found their university profiles online to contact them. I held Zoom calls with them and had a brief list of questions regarding Lumumba's impact and legacy. The direct contact with experts on the topic gave me a sense of what were the right questions to ask. I was given many recommendations for archives to visit, books to read, and perspectives to consider. I was able to question them about the details of the Congo Crisis and their perspective on the events that unfolded in 1960 in the Congo. I also learned about their research process and the potential difficulties of researching African history as a European scholar. These conversations were informal, and they are not directly cited in the thesis. However, the insight I gained through these exchanges was priceless and considerably influenced the final result.⁵² Last but certainly not least, I spoke with Sapin Makengele, a Congolese artist who bases his art on Congolese history and society. Our lengthy conversation I had with him was tremendously valuable, as he offered an insider's perspective on Lumumba and his legacy.

⁵² The scholars I had contact with were Jonathan Cole, Matthew Stanard, Guy Vanthemsche, Emmanuel Gerard, Pedro Monaville, and William Mountz.

Background and rationale

Lumumba's political vision went through a huge transformation between 1956 and 1960. This transformation mirrors the radicalization of Congolese politics that occurred in this short period. Independence, which was an almost unthinkable matter in 1956, became a reality in 1960. Since Lumumba was a vital part of these changes, his rhetoric and demands became more radical as the MNC gained ground.⁵³ Through his blunt speech, Lumumba pushed for the displacement of the colonial regime and the emancipation of the Congolese people.⁵⁴

Lumumba's transformation is particularly visible when one compares *Congo, My Country*, which he wrote between around 1956, and the speeches he gave after the 1958 Accra conference, where he first came into full contact with Pan-Africanism. His former self is a docile *évolué*, a label used during the colonial era to refer to a native African who had "evolved" by conforming to European values and norms; In 1956, Lumumba was unwilling to "dictate to the [colonial] Government what measures it should take."⁵⁵

The Lumumba of 1956 clearly clashes with the newly appointed prime minister who spoke against the colonial regime and defied King Baudoin on June 30th, 1960. Lumumba's transformation is acknowledged throughout this chapter. However, Lumumba became prime minister in 1960 and that was the time his political ideas had the most impactful effect (notwithstanding the impact of his posthumous martyrization). The later version of his political self carries more weight in the description of his political thought carried out in this thesis.

This thesis is source-driven research, focusing on primary sources linked to Lumumba to rewrite the historical understanding of the first Congolese prime minister. Using his own words allows for bypassing the Western prejudice against Lumumba and the posthumous depiction of the defunct prime minister as a Pan-African martyr. The primary sources I studied spanned from the speeches of Patrice Lumumba to the songs dedicated to him, from the newspaper articles discussing his death in 1961 to the telegrams proving the Belgian plots for Lumumba's elimination. Not all of the sources I studied are directly cited: to keep the argument focused on the central question of this research, I had to omit primary sources that did not support the core arguments of the thesis. Even so, looking at these sources enhanced my contextual understanding of the Congo Crisis. Limiting one's research on the Congo Crisis to one kind of source, such as written sources, is possible: the Congo Crisis has been covered countless times and there is a lot

⁵³ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 370.

⁵⁴ Olivier Klein and Laurent Licata, "When group representations serve social change: The speeches of Patrice Lumumba during the Congolese decolonization," *British Journal of Social Psychology* 42, (2003): 587-588.

⁵⁵ Patrice Lumumba, *Congo, My Country*. (New York: Pall Mall Press. 1961), 10.

of research available from multiple perspectives. However, by doing so one might miss important points of view or voices that have been omitted from traditional research. This is particularly important when the topic is deeply embedded in colonial history. Colonial archives and sources carry inherent biases that are challenging to overcome. One of the ways to do so is to delve into non-traditional sources, such as art, music, and oral history.

The conversations I conducted with the scholars whose sources I studied represented my attempt to include other researchers in this project. Through their involvement, I have become more aware of my own biases. To delve into this topic completely alone, without feedback, could be tricky. One single researcher might not ask himself critical questions throughout the research process. Multiple perspectives and exchanges forced me to refine the thesis to the barest essentials and be transparent about the goals and methods I was using to answer the research question. Through this collaborative process, sources that proved to be less relevant were discarded and new ones were added to the list. More importantly, it was because of these conversations that I chose to focus specifically on the life and political thought of Patrice Lumumba and not solely on his demise. Many scholars advised me that Lumumba's assassination and the reasons behind it have been thoroughly explored by several researchers. Thus, I decided I could add more to the debate on the Congo Crisis if I investigated Lumumba's worldview and his political intentions instead of focusing on his murder.

Statement of the limitations

Although I attempted to follow a consistent method that would deliver the best results for this research, I do not claim this research project to be flawless. The choice of this research method omitted other legitimate ways to study the Congo Crisis.

A researcher who has done extensive primary research on the Congo Crisis advised me that it was important, as a European historian, to spend time in the Congo and develop relationships with local scholars. This would allow me to get a better "feel" for the country and would heighten my sensitivity toward the country's struggles. I agree with this point completely. Due to financial and time constraints, it was impossible to travel to the Congo. My contact with Congolese historians was limited, although it remained enriching and eye-opening. Thus, it is important to remember that this thesis does not claim to carry a local Congolese perspective. It is not a collection of oral histories and accounts of how the Congolese think of Lumumba today. Engaging in this type of social history is incredibly relevant but requires time and financial opportunities I did not have. Instead, I analyzed Lumumba's political thought and legacy through

his own writings and through the profusion of literature and cultural works on the Congolese prime minister.

Many of the researchers I cited conducted extensive archival research to confirm their findings. Many traveled to the US, Congo, Belgium, Ghana, and many more places to carry out research on the Congo Crisis. My thesis is not based on such extensive research into archival sources. The few words that Lumumba left behind are largely available in digital form or through a few books that were accessible through my university library. I worked with the primary sources I could access with limited time and budget: Lumumba's papers, archival sources in Belgium, and alternative primary material that has been digitalized.

Chapter 1

Independence and Anticolonialism: The Political Vision of Patrice Lumumba

This chapter attempts to strip away all these narratives from Lumumba and look at his own words and what political values they embodied. The characterization of Lumumba ranges enormously across history: from the moniker of “Satan” attributed to him by the Belgians to his martyrization by anticolonial activists following his assassination in 1961. I use his speeches and writings from his short-lived political career to identify the key elements of his political thought.

This chapter starts with an examination of Lumumba’s nationalist beliefs. The second section comprises Lumumba’s later embrace of Pan-Africanism. The third section looks at the way Lumumba engaged with the colonial powers and the independence of the Congo. The fourth section is about Lumumba’s supposed ties to communism and his attitude regarding women’s rights.

From *évolué* to fervent nationalist

Patrice Lumumba was first and foremost a nationalist. He fervently believed in the unity of the Congo and nationalism became the primary tenet of the MNC. The unitarist message of the MNC swept through the country. In the Belgian colonial regime, the Congolese native people had lost their nationality without being granted Belgian citizenship. In 1956 Lumumba was already demanding that the Belgian government grant the Congolese the same rights as everyone else.⁵⁶ The Belgian government refused to put the Congolese on equal grounds as the Belgians, leading Lumumba to view the independence of the Congo and its separation from the colonial power as necessary in order to grant the Congolese political rights.

However, Lumumba’s vision in 1956 remained restrained to a more humane treatment of the Congolese within the colonial framework. He did not yet envision a Congo detached from the Belgians:

The Congo cannot, of course, escape the laws of nature; it will follow the same course of development as Belgium, and finally its inhabitants will have to enjoy political rights. I believe that it would be possible, in the relatively near future, to grant political rights to the Congolese elite and to the Belgians of the Congo in

⁵⁶ Lumumba, *Congo, My Country*. 66-67.

accordance with certain criteria to be laid down by the Government. In my view, there would be no question of granting these rights to people who were unfit to use them, to dull-witted illiterates; that would be to put dangerous weapons in the hands of children.⁵⁷

The future Prime Minister of the Congo spoke of his Congolese people as illiterate children who had to be reined in and closely supervised. Here, Lumumba fully embodies the class of *évolués*. He envisioned better conditions for the Congolese people, but his thoughts and demands remained firmly attached to the colonial framework. It wasn't until a few years later that Lumumba started fighting for real independence.

As the MNC gained momentum between 1958 and 1960, Lumumba's demands grew bolder. At the 1960 roundtable conference to negotiate the conditions of Congolese independence, the future Prime Minister said that, while he wanted the doors of the Congo to remain open to those willing to lend the Congolese a helping hand, he would not welcome anyone carrying an imperialist agenda.⁵⁸ Here, as on many other occasions, Lumumba demonstrated his desire to rid the Congo of the colonial code and establish a self-reliant state. He resented the Belgian attempts to restrict the liberties of the Congolese.⁵⁹

In a poem Lumumba wrote in 1959, Lumumba passionately lays out his desire for a Congo free of oppression:

By forcing the respect of the white man,
 By telling him out loud that from now on,
 This country is no longer his as in the old days.
 You thus allowed your brothers of race
 To raise your head and look straight ahead
 The happy future that deliverance promises.
 The banks of the great river, full of promise
 Are now yours.
 This land and all its riches

⁵⁷ Lumumba, *Congo, My Country*. 32.

⁵⁸ Patrice Lumumba, "Closing Statements at the Round Table Conference, February 20, 1960," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 166.

⁵⁹ Patrice Lumumba, "The Truth About the Stanleyville Incidents: Rebuttals to the Speech of the Governor of the Eastern Province on 11/3/1959, December 27, 1959," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 91.

Are now yours.

And up there, the fiery sun in a colorless sky,
 Its warmth will smother your pain
 Its burning rays will dry forever
 The tear your ancestors shed,
 Martyred by their tyrannical masters,
 On this ground that you always cherish.
 And you will make the Congo a free and happy nation,
 In the center of this gigantic Black Africa.⁶⁰

In this poem, Lumumba eloquently spells out the hope he carried with him: that one day the Congolese would be able to govern their own land again. Lumumba fought against the colonial regime because he wanted to cater to the needs of the Congolese population, subjected to 80 long years of pillage and humiliation. His final objective always remained a unified nation-state, where all populations and all regions were valuable assets.⁶¹

Lumumba's attempts to unify the Congolese population under one nationalist movement were at odds with the separatist groups in the Congo, such as the CONAKAT of Katanga (led by Moïse Tshombe) and the ABAKO (headed by future-President Joseph Kasavubu). The MNC's nationalism made it the only large party in the Congo putting national unity at the top of its agenda. Lumumba believed those pressing for separatism were simply doing so out of opportunism: separatism offered a way to bolster their tribe to political significance.⁶²

At a 1960 Conference in Brussels, Lumumba declared that the MNC was open to considering the option of a federal Congo, granting each region more autonomy. However, the Prime Minister refuted the premise of separatism. According to Lumumba, Tshombe's secessionist mobilization was exploited by Western powers to undermine the independence of the Congo.⁶³ The region of Katanga held around 70% of the Congo's resources and was thus crucial to the prosperity of the country's economy. Lumumba explained their support for the secession of

⁶⁰ Patrice Lumumba, "Poem by Patrice Lumumba, September 1959," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 70.

⁶¹ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 373.

⁶² Lumumba, "The Truth About the Stanleyville Incidents," 100-101.

⁶³ Patrice Lumumba, "Conference at the tribune of the Friends of African Presence in Brussels, February 6, 1960," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 141.

Katanga as an attempt to protect their economic interests, disrupting the Congo's political sovereignty in the process.⁶⁴

No moment exemplifies the fight of Patrice Lumumba for independence and national unity more than the speech he gave on the day the Congo was granted independence. On June 30, 1960, Lumumba sat still as King Baudoin called his grandfather, King Leopold II, a “genius” and exalted the colonial legacy that had plundered the Congo for eighty years. Lumumba had heard enough. Although he was not programmed to speak that day, Lumumba stepped in front of the Belgian officials and the new Congolese government and pronounced what is undoubtedly his most acclaimed speech. The Congolese prime minister conjured up the brutality and injustice that characterized the 80 years of the colonial regime in the Congo, listing the “heinous crimes committed under the Leopoldian system, as well as the repression and the humiliations suffered by the Congolese under colonialism.”⁶⁵

The speech began by addressing the Congolese as “independence fighters now victorious.”⁶⁶ From the start, Lumumba acknowledges that the independence they had just claimed did not come easily. The Congolese fought for years against the Belgian colonial regime before they finally gave in. By addressing the independence fighters in the room, Lumumba made himself an icon of the revolutionary movements in the Congo, in contrast to the politicians working hand in hand with the Belgians.⁶⁷ He acknowledged the adversity they had overcome and the long road they still had to walk to make the Congo a prosperous nation.

The long list of crimes carried out by the Belgians of the Congo highlighted the suffering of the Congolese people. The prime minister then went on to state that the pillage of their land and exploitation of their people was now over:

The Republic of the Congo has been proclaimed and our country is now in the hands of its own children. Together, my brothers, my sisters, we will begin a new struggle, a sublime struggle that will lead our country to peace, prosperity and

⁶⁴ Lumumba accused the Belgians of economically supporting the secession of Katanga in 1960. He went so far as to say that Tshombe had no money himself. In other words, without the Belgians, the Katanganese secessionist state could not have supported itself. The stakes were too high for the Belgians: their international stature was at play, and they were not willing to squander it. Lumumba saw the embezzlement of the Belgians and the secessionist movements in the Congo as co-dependent. The Belgians needed Katanga to make money and maintain investors, and Tshombe's CONAKAT needed Belgium's support to back their secessionist goals.

⁶⁵ George Nzongola-Ntalaja, “Ralph Bunche, Patrice Lumumba, and the First Congo Crisis,” in *Trustee for the Human Community*, ed. Robert A. Hill and Edmond J. Keller, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 150.

⁶⁶ Lumumba, “Speech by Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister, June 30, 1960,” 197.

⁶⁷ Monaville, *Students of the World*. 110.

greatness. Together we will establish social justice and ensure that everyone receives fair compensation for their work.⁶⁸

Lumumba's speech was interrupted with applause several times. The Congolese, after King Baudouin's humiliating address and Kasa-Vubu's cautious short speech, cheered for Lumumba's honesty and bravery.⁶⁹ In his first speech as prime minister, Lumumba demonstrated his commitment to the cause of Congolese independence and sovereignty.

The struggle for national independence and unity in the Congo found its leader in Patrice Lumumba. Lumumba's aspirations were straightforward: in order to emancipate the Congolese people, boost the country's economy, and build a long-lasting political structure, the Congo had to be independent and unified. Nowadays, nationalism is sometimes associated with the belief that one nation is better than all others. However, the spirit of MNC's nationalism signified a different sentiment, namely the need to free the Congolese people from colonial subjugation. In the context of decolonization, many African countries sought independence through nationalist movements. Once Lumumba embraced Pan-Africanism in 1958, his independence movement became "part of the general drive towards freedom from colonial domination on the African continent."⁷⁰

Pan-Africanism: a shared fate

The All-African Peoples' Conference, held in Accra in December 1958, was conceived by Kwame Nkrumah and his advisors. Thirty-three-year-old Lumumba attended the conference, where his aspirations for African liberation and independence were resolved in the adoption of Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanists "resisted the exploitation and oppression of all those of African heritage, opposed and refuted the ideologies of anti-African racism and celebrated African achievement, history and the very notion of being African."⁷¹

The anticolonial movements in Africa came together under Pan-Africanism. Leaders like Nkrumah poignantly pushed for African policies reminiscent of the EU's collaboration and freedom of movement. The Ghanaian President's desire for collaboration and unity led him to see that the fragmentation initiated by the Katangan secession was serving the interests of the

⁶⁸ Lumumba, "Speech by Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister, June 30, 1960," 199.

⁶⁹ Jean-Marie Kuzituka Did'ho, "In Memory of Patrice Emery Lumumba: His Speech at the Proclamation of the DRC's Independence - A Systematic Reflection." *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies - Multi-, Inter- and Transdisciplinarity* 16, no. 1 (2021): 61.

⁷⁰ Kwame Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo*. (London: Panaf, 2002), 14.

⁷¹ Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History*. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 3.

neocolonialists who wished to maintain their hold on Africa.⁷² After the Accra conference, Lumumba called for an abolition of national boundaries enabling the free movement of Africans within the whole continent.⁷³ He wanted the resources of the Congo to benefit not just the Congolese people but all Africans.⁷⁴ The soon-to-be prime minister of the Congo combined his nationalist aspirations with a Pan-African lens to pave the way for Congolese independence.

Patrice Lumumba stated his strong nationalist aspirations many times before and after Congolese independence. The plea for Congo's self-determination went hand in hand with the call for all African people to be liberated, a demand echoed by the Pan-African movement. Lumumba became one of the most vocal Pan-African leaders, his name listed amongst Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) and Sékou Touré (Guinea). Essential to Pan-Africanist thought is the belief that Africans do not only share a common history: the destinies of the peoples of Africa are intertwined.⁷⁵ Lumumba's fervent embracement of Pan-Africanism was not just a testament to his solidarity with other Africans. If the destiny of the African peoples were linked, the independence of one country was not enough. To achieve the freedom of Africans, the whole continent must unite. In other words, either all Africans would be free, or none of them. Lumumba embodied this sentiment in his famous address at the 1958 Accra Pan-African conference:

The liberating breath which currently crosses all of Africa does not leave the Congolese people indifferent. The political consciousness which, until these last moments, was latent, is manifesting itself, expressing itself and asserting itself more in the months to come. We are thus assured of the support of the masses and of success in our efforts. This historic conference, which puts us in contact with qualified politicians from all African countries and from all over the world, reveals one thing to us: despite the borders that separate us, despite our ethnic differences, we have the same conscience, the same soul that bathed day and night in anguish,

⁷² Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo*. 66-67.

⁷³ Patrice Lumumba, "Presentation at the closing session of the international seminar in Ibadan (Nigeria), March 22, 1959," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 29.

⁷⁴ Charles Gimba Magha-A-Ngimba, "Patrice Lumumba: Revolution, freedom, and the Congo today." *African Political Economy*, January 17, 2021. <https://roape.net/2021/01/17/patrice-lumumba-revolution-freedom-and-the-congo-today/>.

⁷⁵ Adi, *Pan-Africanism*. 2.

the same concern to make this African continent a free, happy continent, free from anxiety, fear and all colonialist domination.⁷⁶

Through Pan-Africanism, Lumumba sought to ward off the imperialist attempts of Western colonial powers to maintain control in Africa. He identified “the old weapon used by supporters of colonialism to impose domination: ‘divide and conquer.’”⁷⁷ Pan-African leaders encouraged a recognition that the causes of their national movements were the same, along with the struggles they endured. Pan-Africanism worked directly against the ambitions of imperialists: where colonial powers attempted to retain the economic dependence of African countries on them, Pan-Africanism worked to achieve economic autonomy along with political emancipation.

Lumumba recognized in his speeches that the goal of nationalists was “the liberation of Africa from the yoke of colonialism.”⁷⁸ The balkanization of the Congo, desired by Congolese separatists and Belgians alike, meant the suicide of the nation’s independence. The combination of Pan-Africanism and nationalism meant that Katanga’s secession was unacceptable in the eyes of the Congolese prime minister. Lumumba refused to refer to Katanga as a state. He continued to refer to it as a province of the larger Congo, even after Belgium and other international actors accepted the secession led by Moïse Tshombe. A united Congo was essential to make sure the nationalist movement did not perish. Uniting with other national movements brought all Africans one step closer to an autonomous and empowered Africa.

Lumumba’s Pan-Africanism also served as a refuge from Cold War factionalism. The prime minister affiliated himself with the non-aligned movement, taking distance from Cold War conflicts and focusing instead on the prosperity of the newly-independent nation.⁷⁹ He acknowledged the difficulty of navigating international diplomacy in the context of the Cold War; still, Lumumba refused to side himself with one of the Cold War blocs.⁸⁰ The autonomous stance of the nationalist prime minister reflected the desire of Pan-Africans to define their movement as neither capitalist or communist, but rather to create a third, separate space within which Africa could flourish.

⁷⁶ Patrice Lumumba, “Speech at the Accra Conference, December 11, 1958,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 11-12.

⁷⁷ Patrice Lumumba, “Speech at Leopoldville, December 28, 1958,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 14.

⁷⁸ Lumumba, “Presentation at the closing session of the international seminar in Ibadan (Nigeria), March 22, 1959,” 24-25.

⁷⁹ Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa*. 12.

⁸⁰ Patrice Lumumba, “Prime Minister's speech to the Chamber, June 23, 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 191-192.

Lumumba, Belgium, and decolonization

The merging of nationalism and Pan-Africanism formed the foundation of Lumumba's political goals and beliefs. However, the Congolese prime minister might never have become so controversial (and perhaps would have survived the Congo Crisis) had he not been so firm in his stance against colonial domination. After all, many politicians in the Congo spoke against the colonial regime by the time Lumumba made his political ascension. The ABAKO, Kasa-Vubu's federalist party, had been around since 1955, three years before Lumumba even became the leader of the MNC.

It was Lumumba's honesty and apparent incorruptibility that had the Western powers worried. After all, a politician that could not be corrupted would result in a loss of control over assets such as the Union Minière du Haut Katanga.⁸¹ The integrity of Lumumba has been immortalized as part of the legend of the hero who died in the name of African freedom. After his death, Lumumba's image was polished and clear-cut. It is tough, perhaps impossible, to conclusively state whether Lumumba truly was untainted and uncorrupted. One can, however, evaluate his stance against colonial oppression and his rhetoric towards the Belgian government to look at how confrontational Lumumba was and how far he went to uphold the principles he abided by.

Lumumba expressed his desire to end the injustice of colonialism many times throughout his political career. He was willing to depict anyone standing in the way of the Congo's independence as an enemy of his country's emancipation. To the Congolese prime minister, the only way to establish peace and friendship between Africans and Europeans was for Europeans to respect the self-determination Pan-Africans sought to bestow to all Africans.⁸² Surely enough, Lumumba introduced Western models and concepts in his politics as time moved forward. However, he always firmly refuted "the colonial project as the source for the current plight and privation of the Congolese people."⁸³ Colonialism embodied the opposite of the Congo envisioned by Lumumba: an autonomous, united, and free state with politically conscious and engaged citizens.

In fact, Lumumba expressed that he (and all the Congolese people with him) was ready to die fighting for his freedom before living enslaved again. This willingness to put it all on the line

⁸¹ The Union Minière was one of the largest Belgian companies controlling the extraction of resources in Katanga. It played an important role in supporting the Katangan secession and putting pressure on Lumumba's government.

⁸² Lumumba, "Presentation at the closing session of the international seminar in Ibadan (Nigeria), March 22, 1959," 27.

⁸³ Cole, "The Congo Question," 29.

was backed by an undying hope in international support for Congolese independence. Lumumba believed that history would not reverse its course and that the progress of African emancipation would be unstoppable.⁸⁴ The prime minister expressed this unshakable faith in the progressive course of history in a letter Ludo De Witte called ‘the political testament’ of Lumumba.⁸⁵ The letter contains probably the last words Lumumba wrote before his assassination. In the letter addressed to his wife Pauline, Lumumba professed his undying faith in the eventual victory of anticolonial movements in one of its most recognized passages:

Neither brutal assaults, nor cruel mistreatment, nor torture have ever led me to beg for mercy, for I prefer to die with my head held high, unshakable faith, and the greatest confidence in the destiny of my country rather than live in slavery and contempt for sacred principles. History will one day have its say; it will not be the history taught in the United Nations, Washington, Paris, or Brussels, however, but the history taught in the countries that have rid themselves of colonialism and its puppets.⁸⁶

With his last letter, Lumumba maintained hope despite his desperate situation, aware that the possibilities for African freedom existed far beyond himself. Lumumba became the most significant Congolese opponent of colonialism right after independence, but the fear that kept the independence movement alive was caused by the various expressions of capitalist and imperial projects interested in establishing their own purposes in the Congo. These neo-colonial projects and their endorsers, as Lumumba was aware, would remain engaged in the Congo well after Lumumba’s death.⁸⁷

Despite the firmness of his beliefs, Lumumba remained a pragmatic politician. Although he wanted to get rid of Belgian colonialism, he understood that the Belgian “technicians” had to stay, due to the regime’s negligence in educating a Congolese political class and the absence of solid social foundations as independence came around.⁸⁸ He promised that if Belgium respected the Congo’s sovereignty a fruitful alliance could emerge that would be mutually beneficial.⁸⁹ In

⁸⁴ Patrice Lumumba, “Speech, July 20, 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 252.

⁸⁵ De Witte, *L’assassinat de Lumumba*. 385.

⁸⁶ Patrice Lumumba, “Letter to Pauline Lumumba, December 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 390-391.

⁸⁷ Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa*. 122.

⁸⁸ Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa’s Lost Leader*. 78.

⁸⁹ Lumumba, “Speech at Leopoldville, December 28, 1958,” 20.

the months preceding independence, Lumumba assured the press that ‘foreign investments would be guaranteed and European property would not be seized’.⁹⁰

However, Lumumba self-admittedly did not seek to make himself popular with the Belgians. Although he preferred to collaborate with the former colonial power, he did not hesitate to call out Belgium’s abuses of power, both before and after independence. After Belgian troops were transferred to the Congo in July 1960 to supposedly protect Belgian civilians, Lumumba accused Belgium of threatening the autonomy of his nation and disrespecting his authority as prime minister.⁹¹ A few days later, Lumumba blamed the Belgians for stirring the crisis across his nation by simultaneously offering political independence and maintaining economic dominance in the Congo.⁹² The relationship between foreign powers and Lumumba remained tense throughout his political career. After his speech on June 30, 1960, he was seen as an agitator and an extremist by many. The biggest fear of all was that Lumumba was secretly a communist ready to form an alliance with the Soviet Union.

Communism and women’s rights

In August 1960, Lumumba’s assassination was directly authorized by President Eisenhower, primarily due to the fear that he represented the possibility of a communist takeover of the Congo.⁹³ Rarely is American imperialism more apparent than at this moment of the Congo Crisis, where the US president authorizes the assassination of the prime minister of another sovereign nation at a meeting of the Security Council.⁹⁴ The Americans and the Belgians were too busy vilifying Lumumba to listen to the few words he had to say on this accusation. Lumumba, educated as an *évolué* and a member of a poorly groomed class of politicians, did not use communist rhetoric or frameworks to address the problems of the Congo.

The Congolese prime minister never identified class struggle as a major concern he would address in the Congo. The few times he discussed the rights of the working class and social inequality were usually in relation to the racial divide generated by the Belgian colonial regime. Lumumba advocated for the education of workers along with the improvement of their salaries.

⁹⁰ Kendall. “Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities,” 538.

⁹¹ Patrice Lumumba, “Speech to the people of the Republic, July 11, 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 210.

⁹² Patrice Lumumba, “Presentation to the Chamber on the situation of the Republic, July 15, 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 230.

⁹³ Madeleine Kalb, *The Congo Cables: The Cold War in Africa - From Eisenhower to Kennedy*. (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1982), 53-55.

⁹⁴ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 197.

He appears to have been more interested in fostering a political consciousness across all ethnicities, regions, and affiliations of the Congo than in promoting the interests of any specific social class.⁹⁵

Despite his indifference towards a socialist framework, Lumumba refused to lean himself and his government to a Western capitalist framework. He adopted positive neutrality, inviting any country to help the Congo if it was done without the intention to impose another dictatorship on the country. When he visited New York for a few weeks in July 1960, he desperately pledged that the Congolese wanted democracy in the Congo, “the real democracy that we see for example here in the United States.”⁹⁶ Lumumba never defined what democracy would look like to him in detail, but whatever governance he wished to establish in the Congo had to be controlled by the Congolese people.

There is one more aspect of Lumumba’s political ideology that is often skimmed over by scholars. It is not the most prominent point in his rhetoric and did not play a decisive factor in the unfolding of events of the Congo Crisis, but I still believe it bears significance to get a complete and realistic picture of Lumumba. In *Congo, My Country*, Lumumba dedicates a chapter to the education of the Congolese, a topic dear to his heart.⁹⁷ With regards to the education of Congolese women, he accuses the Congolese husbands of “the backwardness of women,” claiming that many Congolese men (and particularly *évolués*) saw their wives as nothing more than their servants. Lumumba spoke up for women’s rights more than most Congolese politicians. However, a few pages later Lumumba explains that women had to be educated to adequately run the home they were in charge of. There is no indication that Lumumba viewed women as part of the movement for independence he wishes to stir up in the Congo.⁹⁸

It can be easy to conflate Lumumba’s sparse comments on the liberation of Congolese women with the feminist demands that are now widely prevalent in the modern world. Lumumba’s cruel execution made him a hero in the eyes of nationalists and anti-capitalists around the world. However, his “hero worship threatens to make a saint out of a very human politician.”⁹⁹ Lumumba’s legacy and his political thought must be treated as two separate entities

⁹⁵ Lumumba, “Presentation at the closing session of the international seminar in Ibadan (Nigeria), March 22, 1959,” 28.

⁹⁶ Patrice Lumumba, “Press conference in New York, July 25, 1960,” in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 271.

⁹⁷ As an *évolué*, Lumumba was part of few hundreds of Congolese natives who had received a rich foreign education.

⁹⁸ Lumumba, *Congo, My Country*. 120-125.

⁹⁹ David Moore. “Raoul Peck’s Lumumba: History or Hagiography?” In *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen*, ed. Vivian Bickford-Smith and Richard Mendelsohn, (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007), 19.

since his murder and the narratives generated by the act established Lumumba as an unquestionable and incorruptible leader of nationalism and Pan-Africanism in the eyes of many, erasing the complexity of his character and, ultimately, his human fallibility.¹⁰⁰

Lumumba's political thought was characterized by two fundamental tenets: nationalism and Pna-Africanism. Through his ideology, the prime minister expressed the desire to free the Congo from colonial domination. Having examined the political thought of Lumumba, the next chapter explores within which Lumumba operated and how his ideas collided with the beliefs and ambitions of other actors of the Congo Crisis.

¹⁰⁰ Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence*. 472.

Chapter 2

The Breaking Point: Decolonization in the Congo

After examining the political thought of Patrice Lumumba in the previous chapter, I now place his vision and values within the situation Lumumba was put in after independence. In the first phase of the Congo Crisis, the country held many uncertain alliances, and many countries had eyes on Lumumba. Despite all the propaganda Western powers threw at the Congolese prime minister, Lumumba remained the most popular politician in the Congo. His party was the only one advocating for a centralized government and standing against the balkanization of the Congo desired by Tshombe and his allies. His strong nationalism granted him allies as well as enemies.¹⁰¹ Lumumba did not adopt socialist policies or Marxist narratives, yet the political consciousness fomented by his rhetoric was seen as an extreme radicalization by many. The prime minister realized that the mere act of demanding true independence would be polarizing. Despite these attempts to ingratiate himself with the various players of the crisis, Lumumba fell into a political whirlwind signified by the clash of fundamentally different world visions.¹⁰²

This chapter places Lumumba's political thought in the context of the Congo Crisis, exploring the reasons he was not able to enact his vision in the Congo. The first section looks at the internal struggle between nationalism and federalism in the Congo. The second section analyzes the Katangan secession led by Moise Tshombe and its effects on Lumumba's position as prime minister. The third section chronicles the international schemes devised to overthrow Lumumba. The fourth section focuses on the partial role of the United Nations in the crisis.

Federalism and the Kingdom of Kongo

The opposition Lumumba faced once he became prime minister of the Congo started within the borders of the newly independent country. Many fellow Congolese politicians opposed Lumumba for various reasons. As the Congo crisis unfolded, some of these politicians conspired with Western officials to hinder Lumumba's actions and remove him from the government. These internal conspiracies played a major role in the downfall of Lumumba and his followers.

An inherent challenge to leading the Congo was the sheer size of the nation. The Congo is about 77 times larger than Belgium and constituted one of the world's largest nations; in 1960 the country was characterized by an abundance of different languages, cultures, and ethnicities. These

¹⁰¹ Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads*. 116.

¹⁰² Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence*. 470.

differences had been exacerbated by colonial rule. Colonial powers such as Belgium went “a long way to convince themselves that Africa was a continent of ‘tribes’, that its people were deeply and immutably immersed in the social relations of the village and the politics of deference to chiefly authority.”¹⁰³ The colonial regime often stirred regional conflicts based on internal differences to maintain a better grip on its huge colony. Before the late 1950s, no one in the Congo even thought about an independent and united Congo as a possibility.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the challenge of building a nationalist movement that reached across all regions and that everyone could relate to was enormous. Lumumba had an uphill battle to fight in order to keep his country unified, but he believed the Congo’s unity was necessary to maintain true independence.¹⁰⁵

Since the MNC did not win an overall majority in the elections preceding independence, the party had to form a broad coalition with other parties in order to form a legal government. However, almost none of these parties shared the MNC’s desire for national unity. One of the major opponents of Lumumba, carrying almost as much traction within the Congo, was Joseph Kasa-Vubu, who was nominated the country’s president as the country was ushered into independence. Kasa-Vubu was an ethnic nationalist: he first and foremost represented the Kongo people, the ethnic group that had lived in the old Kongo Kingdom. His nationalism contrasted that of Lumumba, as Kasa-Vubu wished to erase the geographical and political structure that had been created by the Belgians and return to the ethnic regionalism that had preceded colonization.¹⁰⁶

The clash between Kasa-Vubu’s regionalism and Lumumba’s nationalism raises an important question. Why did Lumumba fight so hard for the unity of a nation whose borders had been artificially drawn by its colonizers? Lumumba’s nationalism could be seen, as it probably was to some extent, as the acceptance of the modern Congo as defined by Western politics, and the rejection of the old Kongo and the pre-colonial regionalism it embodied.

Still, Lumumba’s nationalism was a means to an end, a way to achieve political and economic freedom for all the Congolese people. The prime minister was convinced that to maintain governmental autonomy and control over the Congo, the nation had to remain united. Once he adopted Pan-Africanism, this conviction expanded to all Africans, but the bottom line remained the same. Lumumba’s nationalist affirmation had less to do with asserting the homogeneity of those living within the geographical borders of the Congo and more to do with the

¹⁰³ Frederick Cooper, “The Dialectics of Decolonization : Nationalism and Labor Movements in Postwar French Africa,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 410.

¹⁰⁴ Stanard, “Après Nous, Le Déluge,” 151.

¹⁰⁵ Young, *Politics in the Congo*. 373.

¹⁰⁶ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 124.

desire to keep all the Congolese people free from colonial domination. The combination of regionalism and anticolonialism embraced by men such as Kasa-Vubu and Tshombe is at best dubitable. Both were on close terms with Belgian officials and much more lenient towards Belgian involvement in the Congo. It would be difficult to argue that their anticolonial stance offered a more authentic path to self-determination for the Congolese people compared to Lumumba's firm nationalist conviction.¹⁰⁷

Moise Tshombe and the Katangan secession

The most crucial example of Congolese opposition to Lumumba during the first phase of the Congo Crisis is the Katangan secession, which survived the prime minister. Tshombe justified his declaration of independence by arguing that he was protecting the Congo from a communist takeover. Since no substantial evidence for such a takeover was ever offered, it seems much more plausible that Tshombe was keen to protect the immense wealth enjoyed by the region.¹⁰⁸ The secession of Katanga represented the biggest internal crisis throughout Lumumba's time as prime minister because it challenged him on several different fronts at the same time due to the massive stakes held in the region by Western colonial powers. Katanga is also where Lumumba met his ominous end in January 1961, less than a day after being transferred there.¹⁰⁹

The secession of Katanga, which undermined Lumumba and his entire government, would not have been possible without the support of the Belgian government. Other Belgian players, such as the powerful Union Minière, sustained the secession to keep its production plants running.¹¹⁰ In a sly maneuver, right before independence, Belgium had moved the headquarters of many Belgian companies, including the Union Minière, from Congo to Belgium. This made it impossible for the Congolese government to control an essential asset of their country or even collect taxes from these companies operating on their soil.¹¹¹

The friction between the central government and the seceded region quickly ignited into a tense standoff where neither side was willing to give in. Still, Lumumba had shown signs early on

¹⁰⁷ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 127.

¹⁰⁸ Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans*. 215; Moise Tshombe to President Gaston Eyskens, Elisabethville, delivery date (October 10, 1961); More than 20% of the country's GNP and 60% of its exports came from mining, and Katanga provided more than 75% of the country's mining production. This made the region vital to the prosperity of the Congo. There were also uranium deposits and cobalt and tantalum reserves in Katanga, heightening the region's strategic importance.

¹⁰⁹ Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo*. 66.

¹¹⁰ Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo*. 96.

¹¹¹ Jos Beurden, *Inconvenient Heritage: Colonial Collections and Restitution in the Netherlands and Belgium*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 106.

that he was willing to concede ground in order to get the CONAKAT on his side. In early 1960, at the formation of the new government, Lumumba compromised with Tshombe and offered him important positions in his cabinet to prevent him from undermining the new government.¹¹² Tshombe accepted the terms, and the new government was formed. Was he already plotting to betray this agreement and the central government? There is no way to be sure, but everything about Tshombe's campaign and his actions in the rest of the Congo Crisis lead us to think this probably was the case. Lumumba trusted that his parliamentary majority and his popularity across the Congo would keep him afloat. He was outraged by the Katangan secession from the beginning, but in the first few months, he tried to get the UN to help him solve the problem since the Belgians had placed their troops in the region quickly after its secession. This gave time for Tshombe and his allies to organize themselves and concoct a vicious campaign against the Congolese prime minister.¹¹³

The international boycott of Lumumba

Once he was officially head of his government, Lumumba was hindered and ostracized in countless ways by Western powers watching the Congo closely. The hard-earned independence of the Congo was inappropriately arranged by the Belgians in order to assure its continued dependence on Belgian officials and resources.¹¹⁴ The Belgians, like other colonial powers, never had the intention of letting their prized colony slip through their fingers. The true independence Lumumba was after would result in the loss of control over key resources held by colonial powers and their allies. Thus, it was in their interest to clear the way for independence to occur precisely the way they envisioned it, at the expense of the Congo's progress.¹¹⁵

Once the date of independence had been set, Lumumba's position in the Congo was too solidified to have him removed without losing face. The process of decolonization had to maintain a veil of lawfulness to display to the international community whenever controversy arose. However, short of forcibly removing Lumumba from his position, the Western officials and business representatives threw everything they could at the prime minister to obstruct the path to full Congolese independence.¹¹⁶ The US attempted to undermine the Congolese government

¹¹² Patrice Lumumba, "Telegram from Lumumba to Tshombe, June 15, 1960," in *La Pensée Politique de Patrice Lumumba*, ed. Jean Van Lierde, (Paris: Editions Présence Africaine, 1963), 181.

¹¹³ Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. 144-145.

¹¹⁴ Cooper, *Africa Since 1940*. 82-83.

¹¹⁵ Vann, "The unquiet death of Patrice Lumumba."

¹¹⁶ Crawford Young, "Ralph Bunche and Patrice Lumumba: The Fatal Encounter," in *Trustee for the Human Community*, ed. Robert A. Hill and Edmond J. Keller, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 134.

through the covert actions of the CIA. The praise of Belgian officials (including King Baudouin) toward Tshombe's policies was a subtly concealed criticism of Lumumba's "unruliness."¹¹⁷ The international opposition gathering against Lumumba was not only composed of government officials and diplomats. Businessmen along with the companies they represented were just as engaged in their efforts to overthrow Lumumba and place at the head of the Congolese government someone who would be more permissive.¹¹⁸

The Western powers fabricated innumerable reasons to justify their interference in an independent Congo. The communist takeover of the country often made it to the top of that list. The "red scare" was fueled by the ongoing Cold War, which was nearing one of its hottest periods. Studying the interventions of foreign powers in the Congo through the Cold War lens is important. However, as is often the case with international impasses occurring during this period, it is critical to keep in mind other factors as well. The Americans wished to promote a liberal ideology in the colonies becoming independent around the world and used the Cold War tensions and the red scare as a way to justify these breaches of international law.¹¹⁹

Raoul Peck, director of the biopic *Lumumba* (2000), mirrored the feeling that "the world is divided ideologically. It's not east and west anymore. It's those who have and those who don't have."¹²⁰ The worldwide adoption of liberalism would not only give the Americans the upper hand in the Cold War; perhaps even more importantly, it would yield enormous economic benefits for the US government, Western allies, and American businesses.

African leaders such as Lumumba were more concerned with bringing colonialism to an end than with adopting one of the Cold War ideologies. Their priority was self-determination, enabling freedom and social progress in the Congo.¹²¹ What was important to the Western powers was not that Lumumba may be a communist (though that fear certainly struck a chord with many). The fundamental clash between the independence movement Lumumba represented and the control the Western alliance aimed to maintain over the Congo threatened the stability of the country. Lumumba acted as a threat to the status quo the Western allies sought to maintain after independence through the steady sabotage of the Congo's autonomy. The threat of a solid independence movement bolstered by Lumumba's fiery rhetoric was too much to handle for the

¹¹⁷ Letter from King Baudouin to Moise Tshombe, Brussels, Belgium, October 28th, 1960.

¹¹⁸ Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo*. 243.

¹¹⁹ John Kent, "The Neo-Colonialism of Decolonisation: Katangan Secession and the Bringing of the Cold War to the Congo," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 45, no. 1, (2017): 104; For a comprehensive analysis of the use of red scare tactics in the Congo Crisis by the western alliance, read Anne-Sophie Gijss' *Le pouvoir de l'absent* (2016).

¹²⁰ Kristal Zook, "A Decade with Lumumba," *New Crisis* 109, no. 1, (2002): 46.

¹²¹ James H. Meriwether, *Tears, Fire, and Blood: The United States and the Decolonization of Africa*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 7.

Western allies, thus consolidating their hostility towards the prime minister and signing off his death sentence.¹²²

The partiality of the United Nations

In the 1950s and 60s, the United Nations yielded a huge amount of power in international diplomacy. Unlike its unsuccessful predecessor, the League of Nations, the UN had an important say in the way the decolonization of many Asian and African nations took place.¹²³ Hammarskjöld embraced this involvement: the UN became involved in the Congo immediately after Lumumba was elected prime minister. The position of the Secretary-General as head of the UN was rock solid. Hammarskjöld's status and the UN's Western predilection granted him impunity. His actions were most likely not going to be questioned by any of the Western allies, and the Soviet Union was not willing to risk aggravating the US, who effectively backed the UN.¹²⁴

The Congolese politicians, on the other hand, had no real understanding or experience in dealing with an organization such as the UN. Lumumba took the UN Charter and the organization's neutralism literally. When the Katangan secession unfolded with the support of the Belgian troops, the prime minister believed in the UN's ability to intervene and uphold international law by protecting the Congo's sovereignty.¹²⁵

The UN did proclaim to act in the Congo Crisis as an impartial party. Hammarskjöld and other UN officials often denounced the Belgian presence in Katanga. However, they also saw Lumumba as an erratic prime minister who often acted recklessly. Besides, their intervention in the Congo resulted in the stagnation of the situation in Katanga. The region remained a seceded province with Tshombe as a leader and Belgian troops lingered in the Congo. No real change was enforced by Hammarskjöld, who hesitated to force Belgium's hand.¹²⁶

The United Nations from its inception had favored the West. Hammarskjöld's priority seems to have been to avoid the transformation of the Congo Crisis into a confrontation of global proportions. This meant that keeping the Western alliance and the Soviet Union relatively satisfied was more important to the Secretary-General than satisfying the legitimate demands of the Congolese prime minister.¹²⁷ Once he realized the international organization did not want to

¹²² Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa*. 117-118.

¹²³ O'Malley, *The Diplomacy of Decolonisation*. 2.

¹²⁴ Jan Blommaert, "Lumumba, Hammarskjöld, and the 1960 Congo Crisis: A Case of International Misunderstanding?" *Afrika focus* 2 (1990): 105; Thomas J. Dodd, "Statement on the Katanga Crisis by Senator Thomas J. Dodd," (Hotel Crillon, Paris, December 7, 1961), 2.

¹²⁵ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 30.

¹²⁶ Vanthemsche, *Belgium and the Congo*. 94.

¹²⁷ Young, *Politics in the Congo*. 323.

solve his problems for him, Lumumba became disillusioned with the organization and its mandate. He now wished to see not only the Belgian troops but also the UN diplomats out of his country.¹²⁸

Secretary-General Hammarskjöld had concerns about Lumumba, similarly to the American and Belgian officials in the Congo.¹²⁹ He feared a communist takeover of the nation and did what he could in order to restrict the power held by Lumumba. The UN's charter and the mission it dictated suggested that the organization would do everything in its power to protect Lumumba's status and the sovereignty his newly independent country had just gained.

Through a lack of political experience, Lumumba trusted the UN, taking its mission at face value.¹³⁰ Perhaps in his refusal to allow his politics to be dictated by the Cold War dichotomy, one of his greatest political strengths, came also his downfall. Lumumba did not see the UN for what it was, an organization that had a strong pro-Western leniency that prioritized preventing the Congo Crisis from becoming a global conflict over protecting the jurisdiction of the Congolese government. Lumumba's neutrality meant he was not a Western ally, which was enough to make him a threat to eliminate.

The opposition Lumumba faced in his brief stint as prime minister came from various sides. Different motivations brought Congolese separatists, Belgian colonial officials, and US representatives together in their attempts to overthrow the nationalist leader. After the colonial powers and the Congolese separatists succeeded in eliminating Lumumba, the world refused to let the ideas promoted by Lumumba die out. The next chapter examines the impact of the legacy of Lumumba and the links between his legacy and his political ideas.

¹²⁸ Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads*. 124.

¹²⁹ Nzongola-Ntalaja, "Ralph Bunche, Patrice Lumumba, and the First Congo Crisis," 154.

¹³⁰ Kendall. "Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities," 557-558.

Chapter 3

Death and Rebirth: The Demise of Lumumba and his Legacy

In contrast with the common perception of Lumumba, the Congolese prime minister was never alone in his stance against Western neocolonial policies. His popularity in the Congo and on an international level was superior to that of any other Congolese politician in 1960. However, ethnic politics in the Congo stirred up by Western intervention made it difficult for Lumumba's government to keep the Congo united.¹³¹ Eventually, Lumumba's foes concluded that Lumumba's political cancellation did not suffice.¹³² His magnetism in the Congo was too significant: Lumumba had to be permanently eliminated. The clash between his nationalist aspirations and the objectives of Western powers made this thought acceptable and even justifiable.¹³³ The assassination of Lumumba occurred on January 17th, 1961, but it was only three weeks later that the rest of the world learned of his death. His murder had considerable repercussions on the rest of the Congo Crisis. Even after the crisis was ended by Mobutu's second *coup*, the death of Lumumba impacted the worldwide anticolonial movement and partially inspired the demands for black civil rights and emancipation.

This chapter delves into the legacy Patrice Lumumba left behind. The first section details the events surrounding his assassination. The second section focuses on the international protests that occurred in 1961 following Lumumba's death. The third section appraises the socio-political influence of Lumumba in the Congo to the present day. The fourth section is a study of Lumumba's legacy through popular art and culture.

A morbid murder

On November 27th, 1960, Lumumba attempted to break free from his political immobilization and fled his home.¹³⁴ His intention was to reach Stanleyville (the city where he had first become involved in politics) and build a new nationalist coalition there. He never made it to the city. Lumumba was arrested by Congolese troops and brought back to Leopoldville. His imprisonment

¹³¹ Zeilig, *Lumumba: Africa's Lost Leader*. 112-113.

¹³² In September 1960, after being removed as prime minister by President Kasa-Vubu, Lumumba was effectively held under house arrest by Mobutu's troops. Mobutu argued this was done to ensure Lumumba's safety.

¹³³ Kent, "The Neo-Colonialism of Decolonisation," 111-112.

¹³⁴ "Cameraman tells of Lumumba's escape," *Daily News*, February 13, 1961.

lasted almost a month and a half before he was transferred to Katanga on January 17th.¹³⁵ His execution took place later that same day.

The motives of Western powers in the facilitation of Lumumba's assassination have been thoroughly researched by scholars in the last few decades.¹³⁶ It has been positively demonstrated that the Belgians and the Americans cooperated with Congolese politicians to bring about the demise of Lumumba.¹³⁷ Despite the absence of communism in the Congo, the red scare played a major role in the decision to assassinate Lumumba. Communism was the scapegoat for the murder of Lumumba.¹³⁸

The execution of Lumumba was only the last step of the crusade Western colonial powers engaged in against the prime minister. Knowing the circumstances of Lumumba's deplorable slaughter is imperative to establish the involvement of Western powers in the Congo Crisis. Still, I believe it is important to maintain that Lumumba's death was the final act of a long campaign that refuted all of Lumumba's demands for the Congo. Not all actors in the Congo Crisis were actively involved in the decision to transfer Lumumba to Katanga, which was in every way a death sentence. However, all those who had inhibited Lumumba's government and undermined the prime minister were happy to stand back once the matter was "in African hands," and allow the execution to play out just as it did. Everyone was better off with Lumumba dead.¹³⁹

The Pan-African leader was not allowed to go peacefully. Lumumba, along with the two compatriots who were executed with him, was tortured and tormented from his arrival in Elizabethville until his execution.¹⁴⁰ Reports include repeated beatings, the burning of his beard, and the attempt to make Lumumba swallow a piece of paper on which his independence speech was written. Lumumba's death mirrored his short tenure as prime minister, in that it was characterized by a tumultuous antagonism that refused Lumumba any rest. The violence he endured was the direct expression of the hatred the Katangan secessionists fostered for Lumumba, as the international diplomats and Belgian "technicians" turned a blind eye to the slaughter of the nation's rightfully elected prime minister.

¹³⁵ "Lumumba, chained, was reportedly transferred to Elizabethville," *France-Soir*, January 19, 1961.

¹³⁶ Ludo De Witte's *The Assassination of Lumumba* and Kuklick and Gerard's *Death in the Congo* consist of two of the most comprehensive accounts of the international maneuvering behind Lumumba's death.

¹³⁷ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 215-216.

¹³⁸ Gijs, *Le pouvoir de l'absent*. 439.

¹³⁹ Nkrumah, *Challenge of the Congo*. 118.

¹⁴⁰ Gerard and Kuklick, *Death in the Congo*. 199-200; the two companions of Lumumba were Maurice Mpolo, Minister of Youth and Sports, and Joseph Okito, Vice-President of the Congolese Senate. Hundreds of Lumumbist politicians and suspected allies of Lumumba were murdered in the months that succeeded Lumumba's death.

International protests and internal turmoil

The news of Lumumba's death was broadcast internationally in February 1961. Newspapers hailed the murder as "one of the most horrible crimes that weighed on Belgian colonialists" and acknowledged the huge international and local consequences of his death.¹⁴¹ Protests were organized around the world, mourning the death of the African leader. Protesters gathered in front of the UN headquarters in Washington, showing that from the beginning many did not believe Lumumba's death was solely an African affair. African Americans drew comparisons between Lumumba's death and that of Emmett Till.¹⁴²

The brutal murder hinted at the suppression and racism black people had endured in the whole world for centuries; the association between the death of the Congolese prime minister and the racial policies that had characterized decolonization was not overlooked by anticolonial activists and political thinkers. Black activists such as Malcolm X famously recognized Lumumba as the "greatest black man who ever walked the African continent."¹⁴³ Maya Angelou also expressed her mourning of the African leader:

I knew no words which would match the emptiness of the moment. Patrice Lumumba, Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré were the Holy African Triumvirate which radical black Americans held dear, and we needed our leaders desperately. We had been abused, and so long abused, that the loss of one hero was a setback of such proportion it could dishearten us and weaken the struggle.¹⁴⁴

UN representative Ralph Bunche partly held Lumumba responsible for his own death, asserting that the Congolese politician had made bitter enemies in his career.¹⁴⁵ The UN's response to the assassination was highly criticized. The UN commissioned an investigation that concluded the Katangan authorities were likely to blame for the death of Lumumba. The report

¹⁴¹ "Assassins," *Avghi*, February 14th, 1961; "Lumumba is dead," *France-Soir*, February 15, 1961.

¹⁴² John Henrik Clarke, "The New Afro-American Nationalism," *Freedomways* I, no. 3 (Fall 1961): 285.

¹⁴³ Malcolm X, "Harlem, rally for the founding of the Organization of Afro-American Unity, June 28, 1964," in *By Any Means Necessary: Speeches, Interviews, and a Letter by Malcolm X*. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1970), 85.

¹⁴⁴ Maya Angelou, *The Heart of a Woman*. (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 1997), 107.

¹⁴⁵ Hickner, "Patrice Lumumba and the Black Freedom Movement," 203; Ralph Bunche was an African American diplomat who had received the 1950 Nobel Peace prize for his mediation in Israel in the 1940s. Bunche was sent by Hammarskjöld in the Congo in the hope that he would mediate between the Congolese government, the United Nations and the Belgian authorities.

alleged no involvement of the US or Belgium in the assassination.¹⁴⁶ The Belgians also resorted to denouncing the Katangan government as responsible. By blaming Katanga for Lumumba's death, the Belgians established that the secession was never a Belgian objective, but a means to enable the development of a neocolonial Congo. Once it became convenient for the Belgians to throw Katanga under the bus, they did not hesitate for long.¹⁴⁷

The position of the Leopoldville government did not stabilize after Lumumba's death. The international protests sparked by the murder of the prime minister brought anticolonial forces together. Activists held politicians like Kasa-Vubu, who remained president of the Congo, responsible for his inaction during Lumumba's imprisonment. Inside the country, Lumumbist forces reorganized themselves to maintain the Congo's unity.¹⁴⁸ The US government monitored Congolese politics, working hard to establish a pro-Western regime in the Congo. In 1965, the Americans backed Mobutu's *coup d'état* that kickstarted his autocratic regime.¹⁴⁹ The foreign meddling in the Congo did not end with Lumumba's death.

In order to prevent the birth of a new face of Congolese nationalism, the image of Lumumba had to be wiped from the collective memory.¹⁵⁰ His body was unearthed and dissolved in acid. The destruction of Lumumba's body prevented the building of a grave dedicated to the prime minister, which could have become a pilgrimage destination for anticolonial and Pan-African militants. However, although his body could be destroyed, the idea of the Pan-African martyr could not be erased from the mind of Africans. Lumumba's death inspired a leftist swerve in the first generation of Congolese students to grow up in an independent Congo. The progressive movement was established in memory of Patrice Lumumba and continued to fight for the Congo's sovereignty and social progress for years after his death.¹⁵¹ The Congolese students refused to forget their first prime minister. They demanded a governmental investigation into Lumumba's murder and his proclamation as a national hero.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁶ United Nations, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry established under General Assembly resolution 1601 (XV)*. 61-26804, November 11, 1961: 63.

¹⁴⁷ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 313.

¹⁴⁸ Hoskyns, *The Congo Since Independence*. 301.

¹⁴⁹ Meriwether, *Tears, Fire, and Blood*. 97.

¹⁵⁰ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 12.

¹⁵¹ Pedro Monaville, "The Political Life of the Dead Lumumba: Cold War Histories and the Congolese Student Left," *Africa* 89, (2019): 32.

¹⁵² Monaville, *Students of the World*. 123-124.

The legacies of Congolese nationalism and Pan-Africanism

The assassination of Lumumba was the embodiment of the enduring violation of Congolese sovereignty by Western powers, which itself is a prime example of neocolonial action in the 20th century.¹⁵³ The African continent made a decisive step towards independence in 1960; nationalist movements began working together and Pan-Africanist solidarity swept through the continent. The development of postcolonial Africa suffered a terrible blow when Lumumba was killed. Frantz Fanon, the author of the influential book *The Wretched of the Earth*, famously stated that if Africa's development was compared to a revolver, the Congo represented the trigger of the gun. The emancipation of the whole continent was stunted through the murder of one of its most hopeful leaders.¹⁵⁴

Activists and politicians everywhere understood the relevance of the Congo's independence to all of Africa. The Congo was one of the largest and richest nations with a dark history of colonialism. Western powers sought to establish their continued presence in postcolonial Congo through a veil of stability. Lumumba was not willing to accept the intrusion of neocolonial interests in the Congo. His murder changed the course of decolonization in all of Africa.¹⁵⁵ The quiet stability Western powers sought to establish in Africa was no longer possible after the outcry and protests that followed his death.

Lumumba's fate enabled his swift martyrdom. Since his end was so tragic and his words so cathartic, young Congolese people linked their own suffering and lived injustices with the life and death of the Congolese prime minister.¹⁵⁶ After establishing his dictatorial rule, Mobutu himself paid homage to the first prime minister of the Congo, even though he had been one of the coordinators of his demise.

The hypocrisy surrounding the reaction to Lumumba's death is pervasive. Lumumba's legacy continues to influence Congolese politics decades after his brief stint as prime minister. The name of Lumumba is used in the DRC today to earn people's trust and gain "political citizenship."¹⁵⁷ The memory of Lumumba keeps being erased and rewritten in the Congolese imagination to muster support for current governments and social movements. That is how both Mobutu and Kabila, his successor, claimed to derive their values from the first Congolese prime

¹⁵³ Kendall. "Postcolonial Hauntings and Cold War Continuities," 558.

¹⁵⁴ De Witte, *L'assassinat de Lumumba*. 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ Gerits, *The Ideological Scramble for Africa*. 185.

¹⁵⁶ Monaville. "The Political Life of the Dead Lumumba," 21.

¹⁵⁷ Gimba Magha-A-Ngimba, "Revolution, freedom, and the Congo today."

minister.¹⁵⁸ Despite Lumumba's omnipresence in Congolese socio-political discourse, the support for his legacy has rarely moved past the superficial at the institutional level, leaving millions of members of the Lumumbist generation disillusioned with the political class of the Congo.¹⁵⁹

Lumumba in the arts

Patrice Lumumba left a powerful and enduring legacy after his death that resonated both inside and outside of the Congo. Lumumba became a cultural icon to Pan-Africanists, a point of reference for their never-ending struggle. His martyrdom can be compared to the idolization of the *Guerrillero Heroico* (Che Guevara) within socialist movements. Examining the legacy of the prime minister through artistic depictions of Lumumba helps us evaluate his posthumous impact as well as separate the lasting perception of Lumumba from his actions and ideas, which I considered in the previous chapters.

Using popular culture to study Lumumba's worldwide impact grants us access to the prevalent ways in which Lumumba was depicted. Through popular art, artists are able to create "counter-memories" to actively fill the gaps in the fragmented history of the Congo. The leap of the Congolese prime minister from death to martyrdom happened almost immediately after his demise.¹⁶⁰ The line between Lumumba the politician and Lumumba the hero has blurred. The movies, paintings, and songs dedicated to the memory of Lumumba do not only represent his canonization as a national hero. Remembering Lumumba was (and is) an act of defiance towards the institutions that aimed to erase his image and the ideas it embodied from the history of the Congo.¹⁶¹

The 1996 book *Remembering the Present*, edited by Johannes Fabian, tells the history of the Congo through the paintings and words of Congolese artist Tshibumba Kanda-Matulu, who disappeared in 1981. The collection is an extraordinary recitation of the Congo's history through the interpretation of an artist who was merely a teenager when Lumumba was killed. The book was published at the cusp of Mobutu's rule and before the revelation of the events surrounding Lumumba's death to the whole world. Thus, Tshibumba's criticism of Mobutu is limited to concealed digs directed at the dictator. His portrayal of Lumumba is unequivocal. Tshibumba

¹⁵⁸ Christian Parenti, "In Search of Lumumba: Congo's Landscape of Forgetting," *In These Times* 32, no. 2, (2008): 35.

¹⁵⁹ Monaville. "The Political Life of the Dead Lumumba," 30-31.

¹⁶⁰ Clarke, "The New Afro-American Nationalism," 286.

¹⁶¹ Chérie Rivers Ndaliko, "What remains: reviving Lumumba's legacy in music video," *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31, no. 1, (March 2019): 60.

describes Lumumba as the “Lord Jesus of Zaire.”¹⁶² The blood flowing from Lumumba’s deadly wounds spreads out to form the word unity, implying that Lumumba sacrificed himself in the name of the unity of the Congo.¹⁶³ Through this powerful imagery, Tshibumba emphatically designates Lumumba as a saint, a martyr, and a Congolese hero.

Sapin Makengele is another artist whose work is deeply embedded in Congolese history. In one of his paintings, Sapin tells the story of the Congo Crisis. Through a myriad of details, Sapin points to the corruption and interference that characterized Congolese politics at this time. The members of the Congolese government wear shoes painted with the Belgian tricolor, indicating that they still operated within a colonial mindset. The international powers formed the foundation of a staircase leading Mobutu to the throne he occupied in 1965. In this grandiose depiction of the crisis, Sapin’s portrayal of Lumumba is reminiscent of that of Tshibumba: his shoes are not painted with the Belgian tricolor, representing his stark rebuttal of colonialism; when Lumumba is shown in the back of a truck with his two faithful companions on the way to his end, three crosses shine bright in the background, symbolizing the blend of religious sanctification and political martyrization that Lumumba underwent after his death.

The portrayal of Lumumba as a Pan-African hero extended to motion pictures. European directors resonated with the process of decolonization of Africa and, more specifically, with Lumumba’s death. Italian filmmaker Valerio Zurlini produced *Seduto alla sua destra* in 1968. In the film Maurice Lalubi (the Lumumbaesque figure) is captured by government mercenaries and tortured to force him to publicly refute his ideas. Lalubi refuses to give in and he is brutally assassinated. Using different names, Zurlini chronicled the adamant resistance of Lumumba.¹⁶⁴

Renowned Haitian director Raoul Peck (who lived in the DRC for 24 years) produced not one but two movies about Patrice Lumumba. In 1992, he made a documentary, *Lumumba: Death of a Prophet*. The designation of the former prime minister as a prophet speaks for itself: Peck thought of Lumumba as a spokesperson for the Congolese population. In 2000, Peck directed *Lumumba*, a fictional enactment of Lumumba’s short political career. The movie portrays primarily the Congolese actors of the period. Lumumba’s ideas are depicted as a reflection of the Congolese people’s desires.

This amalgamation of Lumumba and “the masses” is common in portrayals of Lumumba, but it lacks nuance. Lumumba’s nationalist movement was popular, but not embraced by all

¹⁶² Mobutu renamed the the Republic of the Congo as Zaire in 1971. The nation was known as such until 1997, when Mobutu’s successor Laurent-Desire Kabila restored the nation’s name to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

¹⁶³ Johannes Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 122.

¹⁶⁴ Pieter Vanhove, “Locating Lumumba,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 58, no. 2, (2021): 281.

Congolese people. To explain all the internal opposition Lumumba faced through the Western corruption of Congolese politics is simplistic. The picture of the Congo Crisis is complex and evades such straightforward interpretations. Moreover, the fusion of the masses and the leader is reminiscent of the dictator who in the eyes of many betrayed Lumumba: Mobutu. In *Mobutu, Roi du Zaïre*, a 1999 documentary about the authoritarian leader of the Congo, the cult of Mobutu's personality is highlighted as a key feature of his absolutist rule.¹⁶⁵ Once “the masses are presumed to be at one with their leader, it is just too easy for the leader to justify his every move as ‘popular’, as did Mobutu.”¹⁶⁶ In telling Lumumba's story, many fall in the trope of assuming everything Lumumba did or said reflected the desires of the Congolese people, instead of acknowledging the complex essence of the African leader.

Rappers frequently tributed Patrice Lumumba and his legacy. The name of the Pan-Africanist leader is primarily featured in rap music from France, the US, Belgium, and the Congo. The Congolese heritage of French artists such as Maitre Gims makes the Congo's history and in particular Lumumba's chapter highly resonant with many French-speaking rappers. The legacy of African nationalism and postcolonial freedom was relevant to mainstream rappers around the world. In the biography of hip-hop legend Tupac Shakur, the rapper recalls how his parents told him Lumumba's story as a kid to empower him to become a voice for black people.

Lumumba's own grandson is a little-known rapper by the name of Teddy L (L standing for Lumumba). In 2015, he released a song named “Patrice Lumumba” dedicated to his grandfather. In the song, Teddy L makes himself an active participant in the rewriting of the historical narrative of Lumumba's life and death. Painters, musicians, filmmakers, writers, and all artists who cited Lumumba's legacy in their work aimed not only to remind others of who he was but to willfully reshape the heritage of the prime minister and work it in the struggles of the present.¹⁶⁷

The legacy of Patrice Lumumba has endured for decades after his death. The 1961 worldwide protests that followed the announcement of his demise kickstarted the martyrization and immortalization of the first Congolese prime minister. In the next section, this thesis draws concluding remarks based on the arguments built in the three main chapters and expands on what research questions remain relevant today.

¹⁶⁵ Thierry Michel, *Mobutu, Roi du Zaïre*. Les Films de la Passerelle, 1999. 2h 15m. https://youtu.be/OpCb_Yg_qJA.

¹⁶⁶ Moore, “Raoul Peck's Lumumba” 7-9.

¹⁶⁷ Idesbald Goddeeris and Gert Huskens, “Lumumba in the Hood: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba in Rap Music since 1990,” in *Lumumba in the Arts*, ed. Matthias De Groof, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 24-28;

Conclusion

The harrowing death of Lumumba brought the first phase of the Congo Crisis to an abrupt end. His political career was characterized by his continuous attempts to balance imperial pressures, nationalist demands, and the limitations of a postcolonial Congo. Balancing these conflicting interests proved to be nearly impossible. Lumumba clung to the false safety offered by international law and the nationalist sovereignty of the Congo until he was overpowered by the combination of his internal and external opponents. The prime minister was murdered as a devil and then resuscitated as a hero. Lumumba's political career is a tale of nationalist aspirations suffocated by a neocolonial intervention that speaks to the present as much as the past of the Congo.

The conclusion of this thesis summarizes the main conclusions drawn and expands on further questions that still must be tackled. The first section provides a brief summary of the main reasons that prevented Lumumba from enacting his political vision. The second section brings to light aspects of the Congo Crisis and Lumumba's legacy that need to be explored further. The third and final section reflects on the legacy left by Lumumba and the implications of the conclusion for the present day.

The banishment of Patrice Lumumba

To understand Patrice Lumumba's time as prime minister, it is essential to emphasize that the Belgian colonial regime did not lay a foundation to support Congolese independence. This left the Congolese political class and social structure completely unprepared, forcing the country to continue to heavily rely on Belgian officials and foreign financial support to avoid socio-economic collapse. The Congo's dependence on Western resources and advisors served as the neo-colonial continuation of the legacies of colonialism and slavery in Africa. Lumumba's inexperience, perceived negatively by many officials at the time and described as one of his main political weaknesses, can be primarily attributed to the neglect of the Congolese political class by the Belgian colonial regime.

Lumumba became a member of the political class of the Congo in the turbulent period that preceded independence. His political thought can be succinctly summarized by two ideological paradigms: nationalism and Pan-Africanism; Lumumba sought to establish a sovereign nation, free from colonial influence and sought to make the leap towards independence that characterized the Year of Africa as a unitary African push. These two political principles were held together by Lumumba's perceived honesty and the inability of the Western powers to pay him off. Whether

such honesty would have endured had Lumumba remained prime minister for the years to come, we will never know. However, it is certain that Lumumba's ideological independence was dreaded by Westerners.

The political vision of Lumumba clashed with the ambitions of Western governments and Congolese separatists. A truly independent Congo would pose a threat to Western financial and political interests. Separatists in the Congo wished to encourage the subdivision of the country based on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences. These were not two distinct factions: many of the Congolese separatists conspired with Belgian and American officials to bring down the nationalist government. The Cold War ideological duality was applied to the crisis by Western officials to justify their opposition to Lumumba. On either side of the argument, however, lay the belief that Westerners could (and should) rule over Africans, an essential component of colonialism and imperialism.¹⁶⁸ Even as the Congo and other nations were granted independence, a lopsided relationship endured between the colonizing power and the former colonies.

The assassination of Lumumba was the logical conclusion to the campaign waged by Westerners against the prime minister. Eventually, it was concluded that the expulsion of Lumumba from politics was not enough. His definitive elimination was necessary to establish "order" in the Congo. The legacy left behind by Lumumba is notable; his impact may have been greater after his death than in his lifetime. Although his actions and words gathered attention while he was still alive, he was only made into a symbol of anticolonialism after his brutal murder. Through his martyrdom, Lumumba was celebrated as a saint, blending powerful religious imagery with the ideals of the anticolonial and Pan-Africanist movements.

Pending inquiries

Many questions about the Congo Crisis still must be dealt with. The vast amount of research on this period exhibits significant biases, as certain narratives are played up and others are silenced. The social history of the Congolese people needs to be told. David van Reybrouck's *Congo: The Epic History of a People* (2010), a popular book detailing the history of the Congo and featuring over 500 interviews with Congolese citizens, has been criticized by scholars for its portrayal of Lumumba and the events of the Congo Crisis.¹⁶⁹ The social, economic, and political vacuum left by the colonial regime in the Congo has vastly affected the historical agency of the Congolese population. Historical archives are embedded with colonial biases, which erase certain local voices to create an undisputed narrative. Social history methods such as oral history, microhistory, and

¹⁶⁸ Clarke, *Africans at the Crossroads*. 325.

¹⁶⁹ Idesbald Goddeeris, "Postcolonial Belgium," *Interventions* 17, no. 3 (2015): 440.

the use of popular culture are ways to overcome such biases that need to be explored further. By empowering local voices, historians can reveal the pluralities of Congolese history, showing that there are no easy answers or clearcut responsibilities, but a multiplicity of voices sharing one side of the story. These means can empower local voices and help the Congolese people eclipse the colonial suffocation of African history.

Tied with this problem is the fact that the Congolese education system remains underfunded, resulting in a lack of local research and thus local history. This problem is deeply rooted in the policies of the Belgian regime, which in the decades before independence refused to implement basic programs to educate the local population and build a national consciousness. The aim of the Belgians was to offer no transitional base for the Congolese from colonial rule to independence to ensure their continued dependence on Belgian resources and technicians. The consequences of this plan are still plainly visible more than half a century after the Congo's independence. How can Congolese historians and students be expected to produce the same amount of research with less funding, fewer opportunities, and fewer academics than their European counterparts?

Finally, Belgium has not yet grappled with its colonial history. The Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren is a public display of Belgium's unresolved past. The museum embodies the skewed relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. Despite the growing number of researchers studying the damage done by colonialism in the Congo and exploring potential reparation, the general public overlooks the questions raised by researchers. Belgium needs to develop a socio-cultural conscience in relation to its colonial past.¹⁷⁰ To achieve this, researchers need to make sure that their in-depth historical research is effectively communicated to the general public. The acknowledgement of the country's bloody colonial past needs to occur at a national level, beyond the bounds of universities and academic circles.

The saint and the devil

It is easy to resort to tales of good and evil in the construction of a historical narrative. These opposites offer a clear-cut version of events, leaving little room for interpretation and offering a sense of certainty to all involved. However, the assurance of which version of events is true comes at the cost of ignoring the plurality and ambiguity of history.¹⁷¹ The tale of the Congo's

¹⁷⁰ Martin Ewans, "Belgium and the Colonial Experience," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 11, no. 2 (2003): 177.

¹⁷¹ Yael Simpson Fletcher, "'History Will One Day Have Its Say': New Perspectives on Colonial and Postcolonial Congo," *Radical History Review* 84, (Fall 2002): 206.

independence is chaotic, carrying few obvious truths. The job of historians is to unravel the complex reality of the Congo Crisis without resorting to scathing narratives of good and evil.

The prevalent conception of Lumumba during his time as prime minister is that he was a demagogical leader with dangerous communist leniencies; perhaps he was hungry for power and willing to get rid of anyone standing in his way; or maybe Lumumba was a black supremacist who hated everything related to the 'whites.' This version of Lumumba was dubbed "Satan" by the Belgians, as he embodied all the worst fears of Western governments: the emancipation and self-sufficiency of the Congolese people, opening the avenue for a third ideological space to be created beyond the dualism dictated by the Cold War.

The demonic incarnation of Lumumba is juxtaposed with the saintly figure that was forged after his assassination. Lumumba came to embody the spirits of Pan-Africanism and anticolonialism, acting not only as a memory of the past struggles but as a banner for the activists of the present. Lumumba the martyr incorporated a blend of religious metaphors and political ideas that culminate in the act of resistance against racial segregation and colonial oppression.

The truth about Lumumba lies somewhere between these two extremes of the saint and the devil. The first prime minister of the Congo was a determined politician who openly called for Western powers to respect the Congo's newfound independence. Lumumba was inexperienced as a politician, particularly regarding international diplomacy. His assumptions of how organizations such as the UN worked often did not match the reality of the situation. This inexperience, however, does not come as a surprise. The Belgians did not train a political class in the Congo, did not develop the educational infrastructure, or fostered a social consciousness.

With Congolese independence came Lumumba's rise to power, kicking off his stunted political career. More than fifty years after Lumumba's death, neocolonial forces remain strong in the 21st century. The DRC continues to be torn up by sectarian violence and regional conflicts: the Kivu conflicts have taken place since 2004 in the eastern regions of the DRC. The Second Congo War (1998-2003), also known as the Great African War, caused an estimate of 5.4 million deaths. The ghost of Lumumba lingers amongst Congolese people and anticolonial activists fighting for peace and stability. Their militancy lives on and the legacy of the first prime minister of the Congo remains acutely palpable as historians and politicians start acknowledging Africa's massive international role in the past, present, and future.

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