

*Dedicated to
the ordinary people of Kinshasa*

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I

Introduction: Reinventing Order

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Kinois and the state

Kinshasa is often portrayed as a forsaken black hole characterized by calamity, chaos, confusion, and a bizarre form of social cannibalism where society is its own prey. The ostensible sense of anarchy is based on daily hardship and sacrifice. The capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (formerly Zaire) has practically no formal economy and an ecologically devastated hinterland. The remnants of its administration provide little in terms of social services or infrastructure. Atrociously victimized, the population refers to basic public services as 'memories'. People are poor, sick, hungry, unschooled, underinformed and disillusioned by decades of political oppression, economic crisis and war. The toll of marginalization, exclusion and social stratification has been heavy. Outbreaks of violence have reached frightening proportions.

This 'heart of darkness' mode of representation, nonetheless, needs some serious critical scrutiny, which is one of the primary objectives of this book. Despite outrageous problems, Kinshasa (formerly Leopoldville) is also a fascinating and fantastic social space. It is a city of nightlife, music, fashion and free women (*ndumba*). It is a vast stage (*une ville-spectacle*) characterized by hedonism, narcissism, celebration and myth building (Yoka 1999: 15–23). It is a city of paradox, contrast and contradiction where new and remarkable patterns of stability, organization and quest for well-being have emerged.

These patterns have arisen in spite of, and due to, deep-rooted and multiform crisis. Function and dysfunction intersect and overlap. There is order in the disorder. This applies to all social and political levels, ranging from neighbourhood, professional or ethnic associations and networks to the level where political decisions are made. It pertains to simple prosaic activities such as securing a seat in a collective taxi, and to complex multi-actor priorities, like water purification and distribution, or vaccination campaigns.

Kinois, which is what the people of Kinshasa call themselves, are reinventing order. The concept refers to the dynamic new forms of social organization that are constantly taking shape to compensate for the overwhelming failures of the post-colonial nation-state. It is a rapidly shifting process that enables people simply to carry on with life and get things done. It entails juxtaposing opportunities and interests, capitalizing on old alliances and creating new networks. It means multiplying possibilities in the hope of achieving a result. Reinventing order is also a hybrid phenomenon because it is based on the combination of global and local approaches and on the intermingling of traditional cultural systems and practices with new forms and perceptions of modernity. The order that is being reinvented by Kinois is a people's initiative having nothing to do with Weberian political order with its functioning bureaucracy, democratically elected representatives, tax collectors, law enforcement agents and impartial judicial system.

The process of reinventing of order by Kinois became particularly apparent in the early 1990s. It goes well beyond the *débrouille* (survival) economy that took form in the mid-1980s in response to the multiform crisis then emerging. The political and economic context of Congo in general and Kinshasa in particular has changed dramatically over the past decade, resulting in a dynamic reconfiguration of social norms. Although the reinvention of order is the common denominator that runs through the different chapters of this book, the process has been far from being harmonious or uniform. It has been characterized by tension, conflict, violence and betrayal, as much as by innovative forms of solidarity, networks, commercial accommodation and interdependencies. These contradictory forces have resulted in the change that we are now witnessing in Kinshasa, changes that are tracked in the following chapters.

The reinvention of order has specific resonance in Kinshasa, but it also provides a window through which dynamics in other urban

centres in the Congo (such as Lubumbashi or Kisangani) and other African cities can be understood. Although the book analyses the rapidly changing patterns of social and political reorganization in Kinshasa, it is assumed that as other African cities become increasingly ungoverned and ungovernable, the Kinshasa situation can help us understand urban dynamics elsewhere in Africa. Urban populations all over the continent design mechanisms to adapt to political and economic constraints. The situation in Kinshasa, however, is exceptional because of the degree and longevity of crisis.

In sardonic self-mockery, Kinois bemoan, 'When you are rock bottom, you can still dig deeper.' The Kinshasa situation is also exceptional because of the legendary cleverness and inventiveness of peoples' practices and mental constructions. Although these systems contribute to very basic survival at the individual and family levels, they cannot contribute to broader sustainable economic and political development of the type elaborated and advocated by Western development theorists. Many attitudes and behaviours omnipresent in Kinshasa go beyond Western logic, which helps explain the perpetuation of misguided 'heart of darkness' clichés.

Crisis in post-Mobutu Congo and its implications for the residents of Kinshasa are intimately linked to the failure of the post-colonial nation-state system that was hastily fabricated by Belgian interest groups. This failure, in turn, is best understood by looking at the broader failure of the nation-state model throughout Africa. The model is challenged from *above* (generally poor leadership), *below* (disconnected from peoples' expectations) and *outside* (Cold War policies and new wars) (Migdal 1988; Zartman 1995; Young 1999). Nonetheless, the interplay between order and disorder and the institutionalized overlapping between function and dysfunction (Chabal and Daloz 1999) prove the urgency to redefine the dominant political-science view whereby African states are collapsed, corrupt, criminal, weak, failed, patrimonial or predatory (Dunn 2001).

As in other typically failed states such as Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia, the complexities of statehood in the Congo are legendary. This immense country, however, has not imploded along the lines of these other countries. The state remains omnipresent on the social, economic and political landscape. Bayart's argument that non-state actors penetrate the state is clearly pertinent to Congo because there are no neat demarcations between state and society (1992). State (and state-like) actors continue to dominate social

relations and influence how strategies on the ground are elaborated and implemented. As highlighted by René Lemarchand, state 'failure is a relative concept' (2001: 16). State agents and agencies play important roles in the NGOization of the country (Giovannoni, Trefon, Kasongo and Mwema, Chapter 7), in relations with bilateral and international donors and in the informalization of the economic sector. This view of the Congo-Zaire state reveals how rapidly the state-society cleavage during the apex of Mobutu's reign has evolved (Callaghy 1984).

Sacrifice is omnipresent in contemporary Kinshasa. The term here pertains to the hard reality of doing without. People do without food, they do without fuelwood, they do without primary health services and they do without safe drinking water. They also do without political participation, security, leisure or the ability to organize their time as they would like. Parents are not only forced to decide which children will be able to go to school in a given year, they also have to decide who shall eat one day and who shall eat the next. In Lingala,¹ the noun used to express sacrifice, *tokokufa*, literally means 'we are dying'.

Caring for the sick and burying the dead are a major challenge in Kinshasa (Grootaers 1998a). Average life expectancy for Congolese in general is under 50. When we look at economic and social indicators, Kinshasa should be a vast dying ground. 'Its inhabitants', writes De Boeck, 'are more dead than alive' (2001a: 63). People who have not died of AIDS should be dead from starvation. Those who have not died of hunger should be dead from either water-related diseases or exhaustion because, instead of taking a bus or taxi, people walk to wherever they have to go. The vast majority of households in Kinshasa have less than \$50 per month, which is barely enough to cover the food bill. Many families have less. In the early 1990s, opposition groups chose the strategy of *journée ville morte* (dead city days) to fight Mobutu (de Villers and Omasombo, Chapter 9). The objective of *ville morte* is to bring a city to a halt by asking people simply to stay home. The symbolism of *ville morte* is appropriate because the concept of death describes the spirit of the city's inhabitants. There are also the countless political dead. Mobutu dispatched *hiboux* (executioners, literally 'owls') to commit nocturnal executions of political opponents.

Until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the West unconditionally backed Mobutu. His regime was characterized by violence, nepotism, per-

sonality cult, human rights abuses and the absence of freedom of expression. By the early 1990s, however, Mobutu had outlived his political usefulness to the West. The erstwhile trusted ally had become a political liability and embarrassment (Wrong 2000). In April 1990 he announced a period of democratic transition and the end of his Second Republic (1965-90) but continued to control the political landscape until the mid-1990s. Eventually, however, his regime's patrimonial and predatory networks reached their limits. Its self-destructive system consumed itself, leaving only remnants of a state. This situation was exacerbated by the failing health of the dictator due to the prostate cancer that ended his life shortly after Laurent Désiré Kabila's capture of power in May 1997.

The transition from authoritarian rule and the multiple implications of conflict has been a period of intense social stress. Although one would think that social institutions fall apart in this context, in Kinshasa they appear to be diversifying and even strengthening. This has taken place through the development of civil society institutions, shifts in class and gender formations, and the evolving roles of ethnicity and solidarity. Paradoxically, thirty-two years of dictatorship and crisis, and subsequently an unfinished transition period dominated by war, pillage and rebellion, has helped the Kinshasans invent new political, economic, cultural and social realities. While much of this volume focuses on people-based responses to political constraints, examples of Congo's relations with the international community are also addressed. The data and analysis presented in all chapters pertain to the post-1990 transition period, although the chapters by de Villers and Omasombo (Chapter 9) and Persyn and Ladrière (Chapter 5) both address historical issues.

Research space

Kinshasa has been studied from numerous angles. Its spatial organization, expansion and infrastructure were painstakingly documented by two French geographers/urbanists in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Pain 1984; de Maximy 1984). Bruncau (1995) has analysed the city's demographic trends; work followed up by Congolese researchers at the University of Kinshasa's demography department (DDK 1998). Janet MacGaffey influenced a generation of scholars through her reinterpretation of the popular economy, emphasizing

the 'fending for yourself' phenomenon (1986, 1991a, 1997; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). De Herdt and Marysse (1996, 1999) and De Herdt (Chapter 8 in this volume), continuing the household surveys initiated by Houyoux in the 1970s (1973), have also carried out very useful surveys in Kinshasa on individual and family-level survival strategies. Shapiro and Tollens (1992), Goossens et al. (1994), Mukadi and Tollens (2001) and Tollens (Chapter 4 in this volume) have monitored the pressing issue of food security.

Since 1961, the monthly journal published in Kinshasa *Congo-Afrique*, thanks largely to the commitment of Jesuit father Léon de Saint Moulin, has documented a wide range of social, economic, political, cultural and administrative issues for all of Congo: Kinshasa is regularly the focus of contributions. Belgium's Institut Africain (formerly CEDAF) has also produced an impressive collection of volumes on Congo in which Kinois issues of popular economy, religion, culture, media and transportation are remarkably well documented. Included in this series is probably the sharpest commentary on contemporary Kinshasa sociology, produced by Yoka (1995, 1999). Yoka's narratives offer a real Kinois' view of people's attitudes and practices in response to crisis and their perceptions of what it means to be Kinois. This question of identity has also been addressed in a meticulous historical volume by Didier Gondola (1997a), who mirrors life in Kinshasa and Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of Congo on the opposite bank of the emblematic Congo river.

Editing a multidisciplinary book on a single African city presents serious methodological challenges. Few anthropologists working in Africa have responded to Ulf Hannerz's plea 'to seek further illumination in the political economy of urbanism' (1980: 79), probably because the Kinshasa population is too diverse to be studied using social anthropological methods and because fieldwork conditions were difficult in the 1980s and 1990s. Economists are confronted by conceptual and methodological difficulties of studying an economy that is essentially informal. Most political scientists study the post-colonial state by looking at large geographical spaces or political entities, ranging from the African continent as a whole to geographical regions (such as West Africa or Southern Africa), and sometimes linguistic spaces (such as French-speaking or Lusophone Africa) or individual countries. In the case of Kinshasa, however, attempting to understand political dynamics and social evolution by looking at a specific urban population is pertinent for three main reasons.

First, even though Mobutu was fond of repeating *Kinshasa n'est pas le Zaïre* (Zaire is more than just Kinshasa) the evolution of the city is intimately linked to the political economy of the country as a whole. Revenues generated by the copper mines of Shaba and the diamond fields of Kasai were controlled by a Kinshasa-based political elite. The capital's predominance in terms of infrastructure, administration, employment, investment, services and image is overwhelming. Zairian identity was largely an urban phenomenon dominated by Kinshasa's image. Mobutu made some attempts to transfer the seat of power from Kinshasa to Gbadolite, his native mini-Versailles in the jungle, but was unsuccessful. The political will of the dictator was unable to match the uncontrollable dynamics of the mega-city's expansion. Kabila's 1997 march into Kinshasa and more recent jockeying for power in the framework of the Lusaka Peace Agreement also proves that the role of head of state is associated with Kinshasa, an association reinforced by international law.

Second, like Jeffery Herbst (2000) or Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1997), we can consider that the degree of political control in Africa decreases in relation to the distance from the capital city. Land tenure practices in the Kinshasa hinterland support this hypothesis because traditional authority is just as important to local populations as modern law with respect to access, usufruct and ownership of real estate. In the Zaire of Mobutu, huge parts of the country were beyond the effective reach of any form of state authority, a situation exacerbated today due to war and rebellion. This reality is encapsulated in the title of Roland Pourtier's (1997) article 'Du Zaïre au Congo: un territoire en quête d'état' ('From Zaire to Congo: a territory in search of a state'). The state and, of course, foreign forces manifest themselves primarily in areas where rent-generating activities are possible.

A third factor is simply a demographic one. At least one in ten Congolese live in Kinshasa. With its approximately 6–7 million inhabitants, it is the second largest city in sub-Saharan Africa (after Lagos). It is also the second largest French-speaking city in the world, according to Paris (even though only a small percentage of Kinois speak French correctly). It is more populous than half of all African countries, a contrast admittedly exaggerated by the large number of very small African island countries (United Nations 2001).²

The creation of Kinshasa goes back to the early 1880s.³ At this time, Leopoldville was a cluster of small villages. In the colonial

period, the European city was organized to serve the needs of the Belgian civilizing mission and was surrounded by black townships. The spatial segregation of black and white districts was controlled as strictly as the migration from village to town. Leopoldville's formation and development have been documented in a study by Lumenganeso Kiobe (1995). This Congolese historian provides a somewhat less colonialist version of the city's expansion than Whymis's interesting but highly paternalistic interpretation (1956). The early post-colonial period was characterized by very rapid demographic growth, peaking at 9.4 per cent in 1970 (Bruneau 1995: 105). The growth rate has subsequently halved to approximately 4 per cent (United Nations 1997: 159). Like most other African cities, Kinshasa's current morphology derives from colonial planning. First, there is the former *ville blanche*,⁴ which is the commercial and administrative district (where white expatriates still reside, and as a kind of historical revenge, many expatriates working in the diplomatic corps or NGO community are obliged to live there for perceived security reasons). Second, there are the planned townships or *cités planifiées*⁵ (these are settlements that were occupied in the immediate post-independence first-come, first-served frenzy for land). Third, there are the anarchic extensions in the southern⁶ and eastern⁷ zones of the periphery that are interesting examples of urbanization without urban planning.

Key concepts: overlaps and contrasts

The implications of dictatorship and the stalemate of the two Kabila regimes have resulted in a severe crisis in the vital sectors which most urban populations take for granted. Health, education, food security, clean drinking water, public transport and housing are simply beyond the realm of most Kinnois. Paradoxically, however, the relative (but not total) abdication of the state from these sectors has resulted in a process of indigenization. This refers to the ways Kinnois have entered into a 'post' post-colonial phase by using their own (opposed to imported) resources, networks and ideas to adapt to adversity. The process has contributed to the unwhitening of the post-colonial political economy and social system. Public health is increasingly co-managed by the World Health Organization, along with competent Congolese staff (Persyn and Ladrière, Chapter 5). At the same time, however, there is a marked shift away from Western-style

health care towards a syncretic form of healing based on faith systems and traditional pharmacopoeia. The education system that was free until the 1980s is now effectively privatized. Parents struggle to pay for school fees even though the image of the university diploma is increasingly tarnished (Tsakala and Bongo-Pasi, Chapter 6). Marncho and Trefon (Chapter 3) describe the overwhelming problem of water procurement and the multiple strategies people have invented to make up for the failures of the city's official water board.

Although there is significant overlap between chapters, there are also major contrasts and contradictions. The volume reveals this dichotomy by focusing on three broad categories: vital sectors, political and social organization, and cultural systems or popular discourses (what older-school social anthropologists referred to as belief systems). All of these chapters reflect the very high degree of complexity that characterizes people's attitudes and practices in Kinshasa. They also reveal in one way or another the capacity of Kinnois to create, innovate, adapt and continue their pursuit of well-being. Their capacity perpetually to reinvent order has been sharpened over the years to adapt to political and economic adversity. The empirical data and analysis presented in the following ten chapters are a testimony to this inventiveness. Some contributors, however, also emphasize its limits. By adopting an interdisciplinary bottom-up approach, this book tells the story of how ordinary people simply get things done in what is ostensibly an unmanageable and unpredictable situation.

Survival through new dependencies

The multiform crisis that brought the near totality of Kinnois to their knees during the period of post-Mobutu transition has significantly altered relations between people, between people and the state, and between people and the international community. A clear indication of this change is the way solidarity patterns have evolved (Trefon 2002a). Solidarity systems have been designed by people as a way of compensating for the failure of the Zaire of Mobutu and subsequently the Congo of Kabila *père* and *fils*. A political implication of the dynamism and multiplication of solidarity networks is the relative protection it provides to whatever group is in power because reliance on solidarity has replaced reliance on government.

While some authors in this volume challenge traditional views of solidarity, others argue that without these forms of dynamic

social organization, the crisis would be much worse. They tend to agree, however, that these systems are increasingly characterized by pragmatism and that there is a marked rise of individualism. In this context de Villers has suggested that 'reciprocity' is a more appropriate term than 'solidarity' (2002: 30). While Kinois are able and willing to extend psychological support, financial and material constraints limit this solidarity, mutual dependence or reciprocal altruism to a pragmatic system of exchange. People help each other primarily if they can expect something in return. Debt, whether it be in the form of a loan, a service rendered or a favour, will ultimately have to be redeemed.

Given the precariousness of life in Kinshasa, people are forced to depend on others. Although there obviously cannot be any uniform social tissue in a city of the magnitude of Kinshasa, there are clearly identifiable patterns with respect to solidarity. According to Nzeza, everyone is subject to a perpetual bargaining system that takes place in all sectors of daily life, cutting across the entire social spectrum. This pertains to buying a bag of charcoal, applying for an administrative document or securing a seat in a taxi. In any kind of transaction there are a number of intermediaries who expect a commission, tip or bribe, euphemistically referred to as motivation. People who try to evade this form of solidarity are quickly brought to order (Ndaywel 2002: 165), usually by trickery, ruse or charm, sometimes by force, but rarely by violence (Devisch 1995a: 609-10).

While people do depend on others, they have at the same time become experts in *la débrouille* (survival by fending for yourself). Mobutu told Zairians to fend for themselves. Laurent Kabila said his government did not have the means to do much. Parents are forced to say the same thing to their children. Hardship explains the invention of *la débrouille*, the expression that Kinois always have on the tip of their tongues. Again according to Nzeza, throughout Kinshasa, from the university to the marketplace, from the home to street, individual interests have supplanted collective ones. Corruption, theft, extortion, collusion, embezzlement, fraud, counterfeiting or prostitution are the various means deployed to survive. In the same vein René Lemarchand (2002: 395) describes getting by in Kinshasa as a system in which are practised 'hustling and peddling, wheeling and dealing, whoring and pimping, swapping and smuggling, traffick-ing and stealing, brokering and facilitating, in short making the most of whatever opportunities arise to avoid starvation'.

Paradoxically, social pressure to share remains strong. Few people, however, have the economic ability to do so. 'Everyone has become poor' is a litany heard throughout Kinshasa. In this context, Tom De Herdt (Chapter 8) argues that the nuclear family household is still far from replacing the extended family, although contemporary consumption units are increasingly built on *vertical* (parent-child-grandchild) rather than *horizontal* family lines. His data also suggest that the understanding of solidarity varies according to a household's economic possibilities and constraints. While relatively richer families tend to conform to the conventional perception of sharing, grandchildren make up the largest part of non-nuclear-family members. Few families, in other words, can afford to feed and house distant relatives from the village as they commonly did a generation ago.

A relatively recent form of solidarity that has taken form in Kinshasa can be described as the NGOization phenomenon; the subject of the chapter by Giovannoni et al. (Chapter 7). The number of civil society associations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based solidarity networks exploded in Kinshasa in the early 1990s. They have become vital components of the dynamic and multiform survival strategies invented by Kinois to replace the state in many areas of public life. The phenomenon developed at this time because the country was in serious crisis and because people had to reinvent in order to survive. Congolese in general and Kinois in particular had lost hope in Mobutism and were frustrated by the fiction of democratic transition. In response to this situation, they were forced to invent new solutions based primarily on friendship, trade and profession, neighbourhood ties and religious affiliation. Ethnicity, once the foundation of associational life in Leopoldville and Kinshasa, is steadily losing its meaning as new needs and opportunities emerge. The association phenomenon is a clear example of people-based social organization driven by pragmatism and the will to survive.

Solidarity has also taken on new meaning for the international community since 1990 when Mobutu lost his political usefulness and the West abruptly stopped the flow of development assistance. Since then, donors and NGOs are increasingly acting on behalf of the state in many areas of public life. In their chapter Giovannoni et al. analyse the complexity of this new form of aid. The chapters on water distribution and public health also help understand the trend. All of these chapters take a strong position against the view

that positive change can only come through outside support. Positive change is taking place in Kinshasa thanks to the Kinois' commitment to maintain the struggle for individual and collective survival. In the most recent version of donor policy, the Kinshasa-based political elite and the international community have compromised on the role of the Congo state as an 'absentee landlord' (Kobia 2002: 434).

An important but under-studied form of solidarity that contributes to the Kinshasa economy is remittances from migrants (Sumata, Trefon and Cogels 2004; Sumata 2002). The mushrooming of Western Union and similar types of cash transfer services is a reliable indicator of its importance. Congolese nationals living in Europe, the USA and Canada (and in other African countries to a lesser extent) are able to transfer money home without having to travel. Migration is increasingly practised as a strategy to diversify income and risk within households. Families are more willing to invest in the education of one family member, often the first-born boy in the hope that he will be able first to study abroad and then work abroad. In the past, students were under pressure from their families to return to Congo after having been awarded their diplomas. Now they are under pressure to earn dollars or euros and send money home. The migration process improves the standard of living of geographically fragmented families. Although fragmented, family members are today able to keep in touch from one continent to another because of mobile phones and the Internet. Migration contributes to satisfying personal ambitions and to the fulfilment of family obligations. In both cases it helps alleviate the cycle of poverty. Remittance money is used for buying a house, paying school or medical fees, or contributing to ceremonial practices such as baptisms, weddings or funerals. Remittances are also used as seed money to start up businesses.

Food and eating

Food and eating is a theme that appears regularly throughout this book. As approximately 50 per cent of Kinois eat only one meal per day and 25 per cent eat only one meal every two days, power, prestige and status increasingly derive from the ability to eat or the ability to distribute food, or money for food to others. There is strong anecdotal evidence indicating increased consumption of cat and dog. The main meal is usually eaten in late afternoon and is preceded by what Kinois tragi-comically refer to as SOPEKA (*SOMBELA ngai*,

PEsa ngai et KAbela ngai - buy for me, give me, please give me). In order to forage the salt, oil or hot pepper sauce needed to put a meal together, neighbours seek and extend solidarity. More than half of most household budgets are spent on food. Food and eating are consequently the preoccupations that best accounts for why Kinois repeat *nous vivons mystérieusement* (we live mysteriously). Hunger in Kinshasa is not new: its intensity, however, has never reached such proportions as described by Tollens. Based on research carried out in the late 1940s, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain has already described how parents trained young children to cope with hunger (1950: 52).

Tollens's chapter focuses on the coping mechanisms, innovations and adaptations that have emerged to facilitate the city's food supply. These patterns reveal how Kinois have responded to the challenges of daily survival by developing food solutions based on trust and solidarity networks. Based on recently collected data, Tollens analyses why food security and malnutrition problems are not more severe. Despite problems of infrastructure, state services and formal private-sector operations, almost enough food is produced in and around Kinshasa or is imported there. It is transported and distributed relatively efficiently while providing employment and income for thousands of people. This miracle takes place in apparent chaos, but follows its own logic based on kinship, community, religious and commercial networks. Giovannoni et al. also address the social organization that enables this food miracle to work because the associations, networks and 'local development initiatives' they describe often revolve around food production.

In contrast to these solidarity patterns that have emerged in the food sector, Nzeza (Chapter 2) argues that the need to procure food for oneself or the family accounts for the multiple forms of *la débrouille*. For Nzeza, people bargain themselves out of hunger. Tom De Herdt's meticulous analysis of changing household composition supports this wheeling-and-dealing approach. He describes the phenomenon of hidden families, meaning children born of single mothers who continue to live with their parents. Young girls are told by their parents to find food in the streets, a suggestion to meet men who will give them money for food in exchange of sex. Nzeza gives the example of a thief caught 'red-handed' who reportedly defended himself by asking the question, 'If I don't steal, what am I going to eat?' Stealing food also appears in the de Villers and Omasombo chapter, but takes on more dramatic proportions. In

their analysis of the violent and very destructive looting sprees that shook Kinshasa in 1991 and 1993, they excerpt a telling newspaper account of the looting of a cold storage warehouse:

The warehouse ... was easily opened with machine guns. Soldiers helped themselves to sides of meat and cartons of fish. They fled, leaving little more than scraps. A group of idle onlookers – men, women, children and some old-timers – scrambled over the remains. In the midst of an overwhelming disorder, the warehouse was completely emptied in just a few moments. (*Le Potentiel*, 1 October 1991)

Food and eating as metaphor and symbol is an important dimension of Filip De Boeck's chapter on street children and witchcraft (Chapter 10). His interviews with Kinshasa street children reveal that they 'eat' their fathers and uncles to procure dollars and diamonds, while for others 'the street is ... where food, freedom, sex and money can be had'. This food can help explain why the street is seen as modern and exciting. This metaphor also appears in the Tsakala and Bongo-Pasi chapter on university education in Kinshasa. In a section on popular perceptions of higher education, they provide some Lingala expressions revealing the sentiment that study and erudition are useless, and that prestige without wealth is only false prestige. The most appropriate one here is *nakolia yo* (am I going to eat you?), which in this context means: all of your fancy intellectual talk can't put food on the table.

Faith

The nearly universal recourse to faith in the face of the despair and suffering caused by poverty and insecurity is omnipresent in Kinshasa, although detractors joke that people who live by faith die of hunger. Faith even helps achieve well-being, which is an often underestimated dimension of contemporary social dynamics in Kinshasa. The Jesus of the Belgian missionaries was replaced by African prophets such as Kimbangu (MacGaffey 1983a) and by the doctrine of Mobutism. When Mobutism failed, hope in Jesus took on new meaning, as witnessed by the mushrooming of revelation churches, pastors and prayer groups. The fact that churches may be filled on Sunday morning, however, does not mean that Kinshasans believe that God alone can help them mitigate their survival problems. Religious soul-searching must not be confused with material problem-solving.

Faith is given careful examination by Persyn and Ladrière (Chapter 5) with respect to faith-based healing churches because they are a significant response to failures in the modern health care system: they heal both body and soul. They help mitigate the destitution crisis in Kinshasa by placing it in a cultural and spiritual framework of solidarity. Nonetheless, while offering possible solutions, they also create new problems. These groups have created a new feeling of belonging for the street children described by De Boeck, the single mothers described by De Herdt, and other disillusioned Kinshasans whose dreams of post-colonial modernity have not been met.

Popular discourses relating to faith have been given an original interpretation by Bob White (Chapter 11), who analyses rumours about witchcraft and success in the very important music business in Kinshasa. This chapter is particularly meaningful because it addresses the two forces that are widely believed to hold Congolese society together: music and religion. Both forces have helped the Congolese carve out a sense of national identity for themselves. For both White and De Boeck, understanding witchcraft beliefs and practices is useful in contextualizing the rise of Christian evangelical groups because social dynamics are best understood by looking at the thing and its opposite, or the thing and its double. The Satan of witchcraft and the God of newly formed evangelical groups are, in other words, two sides of the same coin.

Faith, or lack of faith, is a theme that characterizes state–society relations and is omnipresent throughout this volume. Kinshasans clearly expect very little from the state or government authorities. As expressed by de Villers and Omasombo (Chapter 9), the evolution of politics in the post-Mobutu transition has not improved living conditions and has reinforced an inherent distrust in political processes, what they have described elsewhere as an 'intransitive transition' (2002). The post-colonial state model that was designed to be a provider of social services has transformed into a social predator. People consider the lack of progress in initiating democratic institutions to be a deliberate political strategy aimed at maintaining incumbency to the detriment of social and economic priorities.

Children

Children are very well represented in many of this volume's chapters. This is hardly surprising as approximately half of all Congolese are

under 15 years old, a situation characteristic of most of Africa. They are consequently important social actors and priority beneficiaries for the international donor and NGO communities. The impact that children have had on recent political events in Congo is epitomized by the *Kadogo* phenomenon (Creuzeville 2003). *Kadogos* are the child soldiers that enabled Kabila to march into Kinshasa, and into power, in May of 1997. Children are at the heart of De Boeck's chapter in which he convincingly argues:

children and young adolescents have never before occupied a more central position in the public spaces of urban life, whether in popular music, media, churches, army, street or bed. Children are both victims and important actors in transforming Congolese society.

Focusing on witch children, he underscores the sharp contrast between children in Kinshasa and children in the West, whose social space is generally confined to the security offered by parents, school and state.

By most other accounts, however, children are quite clearly victims in Kinshasa. In the struggle to find water in the vast areas of Kinshasa that are not connected to the public water distribution system, Maractho and Trefon describe how much of the burden literally falls upon the shoulders of young girls. In their chapter on higher education, Tsakala and Bongo-Pasi describe the outrageous sacrifices made by families and students for education. While their analysis offers a tribute to professors and students for keeping the university system afloat, it also portends a serious crisis in the future because fewer and fewer qualified professionals and intellectuals are trained. Persyn and Ladrière caution that many children in Kinshasa are orphaned due to AIDS and other public health problems. Others are abandoned by their mothers, who are often teenagers themselves. Many children grow up under the dubious care of grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, or one of their father's co-wives. An increasing number grow up in the street, which creates a vicious circle: street children giving birth to street children who will reproduce the same pattern is an observable trend. The malnutrition problems of the city's poor, as described by Tollens, have a serious effect on children. He refers to an NGO report that found '42 per cent of children are chronically malnourished' in one of Kinshasa's poorer districts. This point is reinforced by De Herdt, whose research on children belonging to single-parent families reveals that these children

are affected by adverse economic circumstances on two accounts. First, most of them grow up in a relatively poor household, which is the most important reason why they grow up in a single-parent family. Second, they grow up outside a celebrated marriage, which makes them even more vulnerable irrespective of the wealth of the household they live in.

Being Kinois

Despite all of the city's problems, Kinois tenaciously believe their city to be the capital of pleasure-seeking potential: *ambiance*. This potential helps people evolve in a world beyond that of despair and sacrifice (Trefon 2002b). The sentiment of *ambiance* has completely erased the colonial perception equating Leopoldville with a city of temptation (*un lieu de perdition*). Referring to oneself as a Kinois is a sign of pride and prestige. In contrast to a generation ago, today, people clearly put forward their belonging to the human tribe known as Kinois. They are, however, simultaneously or alternatively, Kongo,⁸ Pende, Yaka, Ngbandi or other ethnic groups when for reasons of social, political or economic opportunism, it is convenient to shift from one identity to another. The overlapping and multiplication of identities has helped Kinois counteract the negative effects of political oppression and economic constraints because it broadens their solidarity networks. This overlapping is a very important dimension of being Kinois and extends beyond ethnicity to all kinds of other networks, for example neighbourhood, professional or religious.

The construction of Kinois identity is based in large part on the cleavage between those who are Kinois and those who are not. *Mbokatie* and *mowuta* (Lingala slang) and *kisamamba* (Swahili) are derogatory terms used for people living in rural Congo or new immigrants who have not developed the street cunning needed to survive in Kinshasa. This negative image of the country bumpkin can be explained in part by the centralized nature of Mobutu's Second Republic. It is also a universal phenomenon of constructed urban identities: *monter à Paris* is how the French describe having succeeded in making it to Paris, in the same way that folk from New Jersey view crossing the river to New York as upward social mobility. On the opposite end of the spectrum is *Miguel*: the nickname given to Europeans or whites in general. Today, the world of *Miguel* is associated primarily with money and the status, education,

health care and technology it can provide. *Lola* in Lingala is both paradise and Europe. The Kinois have amalgamated these two worlds, syncretizing the global and the local.

Another identity cleavage that has taken form is that between *mwana quartier* (neighbourhood kid) and *mwana mboka* (son of the country). The latter epithet was used by Mobutu in the spirit of Return to Authenticity (along with *citoyen* and *citoyenne*) and supplanted the unauthentic titles of Mr and Mrs. The valorization of the neighbourhood as a vital social space, in contrast to the city at large (*mwana-kin*), and in sharper contrast to the country as a whole, supports Devisch's hypothesis of the villagization of Kinshasa (Devisch 1995b, 1996).

Kinois identity is also manifested across a broad cultural spectrum. Fashion, referred to as *la sape* (Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes), use of Lingala slang, popular painting and music are important forms of cultural and political expression. Music, most notably, has contributed to the emergence of an urban civilization and transethnic national conscience. It also enhances the image of the Kinois well beyond their borders, as pointed out in Bob White's chapter. When a singer like Werrason, *le roi de la forêt*, fills the Bercy stadium in Paris, all Congolese appropriate his success.

At the individual level, being Kinois today means being able to brook sacrifice, adapt to adversity and perpetually reinvent one's relations with family members, neighbours and representatives of established order, be they the discredited law enforcement agents, market women, preachers, public officials or foreign NGO staff. Being Kinois also means 'doing the physically impossible and the morally unimaginable' (Nzeza, Chapter 2). At the collective level, being Kinois means taking to the streets to disobey, loot or make merry as collective catharsis and response to the state's unwillingness and inability to fulfil people's expectations of independence and development (de Villers and Omasombo). Taking to the streets is a way of refusing domination and the non-distribution of the country's potentially fabulous wealth.

In their daily quest for survival and well-being, Kinois have invented a constellation of codes, discourses, systems and practices that permit the community as a whole to ward off the long-predicted apocalypse. Despite the current context of political stalemate, economic crisis and abominable human suffering, people have appropriated the sentiment of being Kinois. Just as there is a Congolese

nation, there is also a Kinois community with a powerful sense of identity and pragmatic solidarity. Conversely, crisis has also created new divisions, tensions, conflicts, betrayals and animosities. It is out of these paradoxes and contradictions that people are reinventing their state and society.

Notes

1. Lingala is one of four vehicular languages spoken in Congo. Lingala slang is the most commonly used idiom in Kinshasa.
2. Like all statistics from Congo, demographic figures need to be considered with considerable caution. The last population census was carried out in 1984, so figures are based on extrapolations that do not necessarily take into account major demographic influences like AIDS, war casualties or migration of people fleeing war and crisis in the Kivus.
3. Henry Morton Stanley established a trade outpost christened 'Leopoldville Station' on 1 December 1881. He was working for the Belgian monarch Leopold II.
4. Gombe, Limete, Ngaliema and Binza.
5. Barumbu, Kinshasa, Kintambo, Linwala, Kasa-Vubu, Ngiri-Ngiri, Bandalungwa, Kalamu, Lemba, Matete and Ndjili.
6. Ngaliema, Selembao, Mont Ngafula, Kisenso.
7. Towards Ndjili and Maluku.
8. Approximately 40 per cent of people living in Kinshasa are members of the Kongo ethnic group.