

## A GLOBAL DEMOCRATIZATION POLICY : THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO CASE STUDY

### Introduction

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**T**his paper focuses on the trajectory of the DRC's democratization process in the aftermath of the Cold War. It aims to provide an alternative reading of the democratic progress in the last thirty years in Africa. For methodological purpose, I concur with Richard L. Sklar who eschews the depiction of a snapshot to look, instead, at historical processes. For "Democracy in Africa is an experimental process in a new generation of countries. We should study this process not only to learn about Africa, but also to refresh our knowledge about the meaning of democracy itself. As the African philosopher, Edward Wilmot Blyden, might have said, in our time, these experiments in democracy constitute Africa's service to the world<sup>1</sup>."

With this in mind, my main argument acknowledges the relative youth of most Africa's sovereign states (born in the early 1960s) and the short period of the democratization experiment (a process that began at the end of the Cold War). In the life of nations, this is but a blink of an eye. However, as Africans, we are being invited to seize this opportunity to look back, decipher the blind spots, and consolidate the democratic "spirit" through refinement of the institutions so that we can secure a better future for generations to come. My underlying assumption is whether the Congolese people should or should not celebrate the outcome of the December 2018 election – and the ensuing "fragile" peace in the transfer of power – as a measurement to test the democratic progress in their country. My provisional answer suggests that we should accord a critical importance to the *role that the people play* in defining, negotiating, and crafting meaning of their democratic participation. That is, what is our conception and

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1 SKLAR RICHARD L., "Democracy in Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 26, No. 3/4 (Sep. - Dec., 1983, pp. 11-24), 11.

perception of democracy and why we deem valuable the pursuit of it at the expense of our own lives ? It is this perception that shapes political history, institutions, and outcomes in the democratization processes of any given country.

I organize my argument in a tripartite format. The first part is observational and focuses on the highly contested election of December 30, 2018, that provides a good analytical diagnosis of democratic participation as our starting point. If this electoral outcome were to hermeneutically represent the crowning of the last thirty years of the democratization process, then it would be of the utmost importance to highlight the inherent shortcomings in measuring democracies by elections alone. Looking beyond this electoral snapshot, and moving past the standardized measurement, the second part reminds us of the necessity to consider “the history of the present”, as well as the meaning that people attach to participation in the decision-making processes and their outcomes which affect their lives. This awareness is needed to debunk mistakes entailed in mathematical models or mere statistical data that sometimes overlook social forces and historical perspectives. This section therefore highlights conceptual, theoretical, and methodological paradoxes in any analysis of Africa’s democratic trajectory. Finally, the third part constitutes the crux of my argument. Returning to the last thirty years of the Congolese democratic experiment, it underscores the milestones that comparativists may fail to appreciate, namely, the uniqueness of a people’s history, the differences of their culture, and the road traveled in shaping their institutions and politics.

## **1. Sifting through the most recent election outcomes**

### **1.1. The first DRC power transfer ever**

A historic event occurred on January 24, 2019, celebrating a peaceful transfer of power for the first time in the history of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The event was followed worldwide by millions of Congolese and non-Congolese through live broadcast by major global media outlets including the BBC, TV5, RFI, France 24 and social media. This symbolically meaningful event in the political history of the DRC – the first ever transfer of power from a sitting president to an opposition leader who was declared the winner of the election – seemed unreal. It was the crowning of the long democratization process that started thirty years ago, when during the April 24, 1990, historic speech, President Mobutu Sese Seko agreed to the liberalization pressure and opened the DRC (formerly known as Zaïre) to the democratization process. Ever since, the Congolese march toward democracy has been bumpy, marred with violence, a regional military invasion in 1996 to oust Mobutu, protracted armed conflicts between 1998 and 2003, with different militia controlling different regions, all of which left the country in a state of profound political crises and divisions.

## 1.2. The Constitution and the CENI

After a decade of unspeakable violence, protracted armed conflicts, and political uncertainties, the DRC was back as a normal and functioning state when the new Constitution was promulgated on February 18, 2006. The text which was initially submitted to a popular referendum on December 18 and 19, 2005, stipulates in its Preamble that “In order to put an end to this chronic crisis of legitimacy and to give the country every chance to rebuild itself (...); [we need] to set up a new political order, *based on a new democratic constitution* on the basis of which the Congolese people can choose their leaders, at the end of *free, pluralistic, democratic, transparent and credible elections*” (the emphasis is mine). The new Constitution was devised to put an end the long political legitimacy crisis and to provide the basis for a new beginning of the Congolese democratic state. The text also invests in the Congolese people the power to freely choose their leaders in pluralistic, free and above all credible elections. A two-terms limit is enshrined to control how long the incumbent president can stay in office. Besides, the Constitution establishes the National Independent Electoral Commission to organize election every five years.

This Constitution established in its Title V, Article 211, a National Independent Electoral Commission (its French acronym is CENI) as one of the national institutions to support democracy. The CENI's mandate is to organize the electoral process including voters' enrollment, referenda when needed, to hold and update the electoral lists, as well as to ensure the regularity of the electoral processes. Thus, adopting this constitution in February 2006 was a milestone after 10 years of protracted armed conflicts that left the DRC in a *de facto* state of balkanization between 1998 and 2003. Since becoming independent in 1960, the DRC arguably held its first democratic election on July 30, 2006. This was a result of national, regional, and international efforts and pressure on the Congolese political elites after years of violence that arguably had claimed more than 6 million lives<sup>2</sup>. Most observers viewed this as a symbolic and direct form of democratic participation, the first election, after so much political trials, marked a new beginning in the Congo's history. The election saw the confirmation victory of the incumbent Joseph Kabila – who had come to power after the assassination of his father Laurent Désiré Kabila in 2001. Although the opposition leader Jean Pierre Bemba contested the result, most reports agree that the election was credible overall<sup>3</sup>.

2 “Six Million Dead in Congo's War,” <https://www.caritas.org/2010/02/six-million-dead-in-congos-war/>.

3 NBOMA-BINDA ; J. OTEMKONGO ; et L. MOSWA MOMBO, « Démocratie et Participation à la Vie Politique : Une Évaluation des Premiers Pas dans la III<sup>ème</sup> République. » AfriMap et Open Society Initiative for South Africa : Open Society, 2010.

When Joseph Kabila returned to vie for a second term in 2011, his main challenger was the emblematic Congolese opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi, a veteran of Congolese politics. Most Congolese were caught by surprise as Kabila was proclaimed the winner with 48.97% against the 32% of his rival. Early that year, on January 20, 2011, the Parliament had amended the Constitution to provide for the election of the president at a simple one round majority vote (Constitution of the DRC, Art. 71). Of course, Tshisekedi contested the results which he called “a real provocation of the Congolese people<sup>4</sup>.” He saw himself as the legitimate president following what he called “the real results.” In the meantime, Jean Pierre Bemba who contended in the 2006 election had been arrested in 2008 and transferred to the Hague. He would spend 10 years at the International Criminal Court (ICC) for alleged crimes against humanity perpetrated by his militiamen in Central Africa Republic. To assuage the post-election crisis in the DRC, many believe, the International Community wanted to remove him to give the yet fragile democracy in the DRC a chance. Later, after the 2011 election, President Joseph Kabila took upon himself the task of silencing his disgruntled opponent. Etienne Tshisekedi was put under house arrest while Joseph Kabila was sworn in for a second presidential term. Yet even though both the 2006 and the 2011 elections were followed by protests and violence, the DRC was resolutely engaged on the democratic path, of making elections the only legitimate way to ascend to power.

### **1.3. Prevarications in the election organization**

The next cycle of election was now expected in 2016. This time around, the constitution prohibited President Joseph Kabila from running for a third term. In 2015, the CENI announced its incapacity to organize the election due to financial, technical, and logistical problems. Nevertheless, the Congolese government rejected offers for financial aid alleging sovereignty reasons. Given the silence of President Joseph Kabila on whether he wanted to change the Constitution or to step down, the Congolese people saw in these prevarications clear evidence of the Kabila regime’s unwillingness to relinquish power.

Given the evolution of the electoral process and the unlikelihood of Tshisekedi’s win, proponents claimed it did not matter who the winner was as long as Kabila was kicked out of office. Besides, they affirmed, there exists *no perfect* democracy anywhere in the world. The government had refused external observer mission or supervision during the elections to ascertain its sovereignty. Even former South African president Thabo Mbeki was not allowed in the country, while he was commissioned by the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) of which the DRC is a member was denied

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4 David SMITH, “Congo Elections Sparks Violent Protests,” *The Guardian*, December 10, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/dec/10/congo-election-result-violent-protests>.

access. In the words of Congolese government Communications Minister, Lambert Mende, to the AFP, “Observers tend to behave like proconsuls. They don’t respect the DRC’s autonomy. We want to mark our sovereignty”. Earlier, the Congolese government had revoked the accreditation of EU Ambassador to the DRC, Bart Ouvry, as well as the Catholic Nuncio Monsignor Luis Mariano Montemayor prior to the elections. Through the government’s prevarications, everyone understood that President Kabila and his regime were not anxious to give up power and were plotting to rig the electoral process. As the most trusted institution in the country, the Catholic Church felt it was now its responsibility to prepare and deploy 40,000 observers around the country to oversee the elections.

Since the pattern in the Great Lakes region was anti-democratic with the examples of Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni, Rwandan president Paul Kagame, and Burundian president Pierre Nkurunziza, to inspire him. The Civil Society along with the active Conference of Catholic Bishops (hereafter CENCO) in the Congo continued putting pressure on the government to respect the Constitution as much as possible<sup>5</sup>. The political opposition parties, along with the civil society, non-violent watchdog organizations and youth movements such as “Filimbi” and “La Lucha”, organized protests, and civil resistance across the country to increase pressure on Joseph Kabila. Many lost their lives on January 19, 2015, when a student’s-led protest to resist the changing of the Constitution was met by brute police violence. Again, as Kabila failed to observe the one-year transition period to organize for the election of his successor, postponing it for another year, Catholic activists were brutalized in churches to dissuade planned protests on December 31, 2017. Yet, more activists were killed by the Congolese police force. The CENCO, which is one of the most trusted institutions in the country and has experience monitoring the democratic progress in the DRC since the early 1990s, stepped in to mediate and oversee the negotiations between the government and the opposition. An agreement was reached about the duration of the transition. The Catholic Church remained involved in monitoring the preparation and, later, the monitoring of the electoral process.

After much equivocation, postponement, and pressure from the domestic forces and with the help of international media and democracy stakeholders, the CENI eventually organized the election on December 30, 2018. The event was highly significant because, for the people, it meant replacing President Kabila and his regime at the end of his constitutional term limit. The holding of election was seen as a victory of the Congolese people and their aspiration for democracy. The CENI’s initial plan to announce the provisional results on January 6, 2019, failed, arguing difficulties in

5 CIIP, “Mouvements Citoyens en Afrique : Un Espoir pour tout un Continent ? » 27 mars 2018, available at <https://www.ritimo.org/Au-Congo-RDC-La-Lucha-et-Filimbi>.

transporting ballot papers from polling centers to tallying centers. In a tensed climate and to preclude the government from proclaiming cooked results, the CENCO went ahead and shared the analysis of its observation mission on January 4 with the diplomatic corps in Kinshasa. It also congratulated the Congolese people for showing determination to defend the constitution and for participating in this democratic and civic duty<sup>6</sup>. This expression of the nation's deep desire for democracy and political change would unfortunately be trampled upon as the outgoing government closed a deal with one of the opposition leaders.

But on January 10, 2019, the CENI rushed to publish its provisional results declaring against all odds the ruling party's candidate Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary as the loser. He came third with only 23.8% behind Martin Fayulu who scored, according to official results, 34.7%. The election proclaimed winner was Felix Tshisekedi with 38.5%. The participation rates were the lowest since 2006 with only 47.6% of the 40 million registered voters.<sup>7</sup> This has been explained by the fact that certain towns that make the strongholds of the opposition such as Beni, Butembo, and Yumbi were banned from participating in the election.

The Congolese people's reaction did not wait as the Catholic Church's observation mission had given Fayulu the winner with 62%. Reminding the Bishops that they had no constitutional mandate to proclaim the election results, both the government and the CENI sternly warned the CENCO that it would bear full responsibility in case chaos ensued at the publication of the CENI's official results. The Congo Research Group (CRG), a think tank at the University of New York that had conducted poll surveys before the election, analyzed the data from documents leaked to media outlets such as Radio France International (RFI), the Financial Times (FT), and TV5 Monde. The CRG found convergence between the CENCO's and the CENI's results<sup>8</sup>. After tallying 86% of the total votes, the analysis corroborated the CENCO's results that Martin Fayulu had won the election with close to 59.4%<sup>9</sup>. However, fearing Martin Fayulu's radical positions, the Kabila's regime preferred to strike a deal with Félix Tshisekedi who was then announced the winner of the December 2018 election. This move deeply divided the Congolese opposition that initially sought to present a single candidate to challenge Kabila's pick in the election<sup>10</sup>. But both the UDPS

6 Commission Justice et Paix de la Conférence Épiscopale Nationale du Congo, « Observation des élections Présidentielle, Législatives Nationales et Provinciales du 30 décembre 2018 en République Démocratique du Congo : Déclaration Préliminaire » Available at <https://deboutcongolaises.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/RAPPORT-DE-LA-MISSION-DOBSERVATION-ELECTORALE-DE-LA-CENCO-VERSION-COMLETE.pdf>.

7 <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/10/drc-election-results-analysis-implausible/>.

8 Jason STEARNS, "Who Really Won the Congolese Election?" (January 16, 2019) <http://congo-researchgroup.org/congolese-election-leaks/>.

9 <https://www.ft.com/content/2b97f6e6-189d-11e9-b93e-f4351a53f1c3>.

10 <https://storage.googleapis.com/kofiannanfoundation.org/2018/11/7ef6e569-accord-de-coalition-politique-des-forces-de-lopposition-lamuka.pdf>.

leader Félix Tshisekedi and UNC's Vital Kamerhe rescinded their signature and defected from the Lamuka coalition that was created in Geneva, on November 11, 2018.

As the people started protesting the results and as the powerful Catholic prelate, Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, demanded the truth of the ballot to be respected, the CENCO along with international DRC's democracy stakeholders called the despoiled candidate to take the matter to court. Unfortunately, the Constitutional Court ruling on January 20, confirmed the win of Félix Tshisekedi, pushing Martin Fayulu to now turn to the international community. The African Union had already failed its mediation attempt, leaving the DRC to reclaim the sovereignty of its institutions over domestic matters. Mo Ibrahim and Alan Doss, respectively founder and chair of the Mo Ibrahim Foundation and president of the Kofi Annan Foundation, called the Congo's election a defeat for democracy and a disaster for the people. In their article, they called on international institutions not to abandon the democratic aspirations of the Congolese people<sup>11</sup>. Two months after Tshisekedi's inauguration, international reactions continue trickling in. The US Secretary of State issued visa restriction sanctions against Congolese officials involved in undermining democracy<sup>12</sup>, it is now the turn of the US Department of Treasury Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to freeze assets of CENI's officials<sup>13</sup>.

Although the proclaimed results of the December 30, 2018 election "failed to ensure the vote reflected the will of the Congolese people", as the text reads, thus undermining the sovereignty of the Congolese people one more time, my argument remains that Congo's democracy is getting consolidated by being tried as it is. I will explain this in the next section that looks critically at the genesis, evolution, and contextual operationalization concept of democracy, which I still hold along Amartya Sen's argument to be a universal value.

11 Mo IBRAHIM, and Alan Doss, "Congo's election: a defeat for democracy and a disaster for the people." <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/feb/09/democratic-republic-of-the-congo-election-a-defeat-for-democracy-disaster-for-people-mo-ibrahim>.

12 These include (1) Mr. Corneille Nangaa, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (D.R.C.) National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) ; (2) Mr. Norbert Basengezi Katintima, Vice President of CENI ; (3) Mr. Marcellin Mukolo Basengezi, Advisor to the President of CENI; (4) Mr. Aubin Minaku Ndjalandjoko, President of the D.R.C.'s National Assembly; and (5) Mr. Benoit Lwamba Bindu, President of the D.R.C.'s Constitutional Court." <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2019/02/289644.htm>.

13 Available at <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sm633?fbclid=IwAR1d4RZF8FjLA5VF6P0DomHufnKbAjAfjTXVJYaEbFxxb1hdFfMX6CaccTQ>.

## **2. Whose democracy – and whose democratic experiment – is it anyway ?**

### **2.1. Democracy : the concept and its meaning**

Democracy has indeed become the most acceptable system of governance worldwide but each country has to claim its own experience. While its origin is traced in ancient Greece, its expansion to the rest of the world is one of the important occurrences of the twentieth century, Amartya Sen argues<sup>14</sup>. Its collapse in ancient Greece paved way for authoritarianism as well as asymmetric governance systems but then it began to grow gradually until it became for most nations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century some sort of entitlement or the normal form of government. In this novel idea, democracy has become a universal commitment. But democracy has always meant different things to different peoples and in different times. For instance, Horowitz (2006 : 114) claims that the mistake of the post-Cold War global policy was that the world's only superpower committed rhetorically and militarily to promote a political system that remained undefined. Indeed, before democracy could achieve the kind of universal and ponderable normativity it now enjoys, it had traversed millennia of conceptual refinements and transformations. The polarization in the democratic theory debate, as well as the divergence in measurement outcomes demonstrates a lack of consensus on how democracy should best be conceptualized.

If indeed democracy means “the rule of the people, by the people, and for the people” according to the famous definition attributed to American president Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), then the underlying assumption of who counts for the “people” should be examined and when, in the process, they became members of the people's community. As Cameroonian thinker Celestin Monga – echoing David Held – wonders, who qualifies as and who is to be included in the concept of “the people”? What kind of participation, and under which conditions, is really envisaged ?<sup>15</sup> Thus, the assumption that democracy has been unequivocally the best of regimes is not warranted since the notion of the rule of the people has been disputed ever since democracy's inception. Plato and Aristotle, for instance, looked at it with contempt while for the sake of political order they favored aristocracy since the “rule of the people” is inherently corrupt and unstable. Arguably, Socrates was sentenced to death by Athenians to revenge his betrayal of their democracy in support of the Spartan aristocracy<sup>16</sup>.

It is really the legacy of modernity that came to associate democracy with the notions of justice and equality – although the notion of justice excluded the conception of gender and race at the outset. However, it is important

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14 Amartya Kumar SEN. “Democracy as a universal value.” *Journal of democracy* 10, no. 3 (1999), 3.

15 Celestin MONGA, *Anthropology of anger : civil society and democracy in Africa*. Boulder : Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996, p. 19.

16 Guy DONNAY, “Le Parcours Intellectuel de Socrate,” in *Antiquité Classique*, Vol. 78, 2009, pp. 39-61.

to bear in mind that even though the moderns bestowed on the concept of democracy the notion of equality, the liberal perspective of democratic equality originally included only the property owners – who represented a mere ten percent of the general population – in the concept “the people”. This first observation shows that assumption about people’s participation should not be taken for granted even when talking about democracy. The difference with the ancient perception, however, is that democracy was based on citizen participation in public affairs for the ancients but now, in modern times, it “is no longer foreign, in its historical manifestation, to the ideology of progress” and represented rather a theoretical proposal for balancing the might of sovereign states with the rights of individuals to own property<sup>17</sup>. Although not universally practiced today nor uniformly accepted, democratic governance status is generally taken to be the right way as it focuses on political arrangements of participation, that is, institutions and processes guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of people, their equality of opportunity and access, and the principles upon which just distribution of social benefits and burdens are maintained<sup>18</sup>.

If the blessing (or curse) of the modern conceptual transformation was its coupling with liberalism as though these terms were natural mates, some lingering contempt for democratic virtues of popular participation has persisted until today. Since liberalism derived its legitimacy from the authority of the state to protect individual freedoms – implying the right of private property owners – not the rights of the masses, J.S. Mill’s concern was about the mediocrity of the masses who no longer needed to take their opinions from the dignitaries of Church or State leaders<sup>19</sup>. The view that the younger generation is losing faith in democracy – even with the Western countries alone – as suggested by Harvard University research Yascha Mounk and University of Melbourne political scientist Roberto Stefan Foa reflects the very methodological bias of aggregating “human” samples from various historical experiences and attempting to measure the value of democracy on a standardized scale<sup>20</sup>. But, it is liberalism that constitutes the very source of the democratic crisis both in Africa and elsewhere. The paradoxes inherent to the liberal democratic experiments in Africa can thus be summarized in the following three quandaries.

17 Alain de BENOIST, “The Current Crisis of Democracy,” in *Telos*, Vol. 2011, No. 156, Fall 2011, pp. 7-23.

18 Georg SORESENSEN, “Democracy, Authoritarianism, and State Strength,” *European Journal of Development Research* (Vol.5, No.1, 1993, pp. 6-34), 10.

19 Francis FUKUYAMA, “The Future of History : Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Decline of the middle-class?” *Foreign Affairs* (Vol. 91, No. 1, January/February 2012, pp. 53-61), 54.

20 Gwynn GUILFORD, « Harvard research suggests that an entire global generation has lost faith in democracy,” (November 30, 2016) <https://qz.com/848031/harvard-research-suggests-that-an-entire-global-generation-has-lost-faith-in-democracy/>

## **2.2. Theoretical paradoxes**

The first paradox concerns the very nature of the African state and the distribution of power. While the modern state has undergone profound changes in the recent globalization times, the fragility of the typical African polity exposes a contradiction of principles entailed both in the nature of the state and the notion of “liberal democracy.” The goal of state formation in Africa was not to ensure the welfare of the people but to constrain them toward production of colonial interests. The African post-independence struggle to convert and adapt the inherited structures to serve domestic interests were met with Western resistance. If the Cold War justified this policy attitude, the globalization trends tend to obfuscate the structural realist tension between domestic democratic demands and international realist interests. And although some have extolled its potential to boost economic growth in Africa, it is obvious that countries with weaker institutions have rather suffered more marginalization, unfairness of labor practices, environmental depletion, and further erosion of the state’s capacity to provide welfare programs. Hence, the state in Africa has rather abdicated and easily so its welfare – not only social but also political – role to mimic the urgency of economic development.

The second paradox at the heart of the current push for liberal democracy is between participation and the undemocratic market forces. With weaker regulatory leverage, governments in developing countries are incapable of mitigating socio-economic inequalities while it feels compelled to protect the wealth of a new global aristocracy. Actually, while democracy seeks to maintain people’s sovereignty, liberalism undermines such a claim for the simple reason that it invests in a minority group of property owners with extravagant powers that hamper the people’s demands for social justice. The “third wave of democratization followed the globalization process in which domestic claims for social justice were pitted against a global ideology (Denault 2008 ; 2010). Thus, liberalism is in contradiction of principles with democracy when selfishness overtakes the common good; and individuals overlook the community for the sake of material wealth creation.

This leads to the third paradox which is about the distribution of human worth or human dignity. While it is now clear that democracy and capitalism are not natural mates, and that the current crisis of democracy is global and not peculiar to Africa, it should be acknowledged that Africa’s rush toward democracy was a statement against abuse of power and wealth by dictators, but even more, the claim for human rights and dignity. The sluggishness of Africa’s democratic progress could possibly find an alternative explanation in the very nature of liberalism. This is not to insinuate that democracy and economic liberalization are incompatible. It is however true that the terms “liberal” and “democracy” are in contradiction, not in complementarity, with

each other. Hence, any democracy measuring activity begs for nuances and historical contextualization.

### 2.3. Some methodological quandaries

The coincidence between the inception of the democratization process and the end of the Cold War has prompted many to interpret the phenomenon as being coterminous with economic liberalism. Although the end of communism also meant the triumph of capitalism, it is a fallacy to think that the simple fact that democratization requirements during the 1990s were delivered in the same package with the demands of global capitalism *nullifies* the Africans' aspiration to live in open societies – and consequently, that African countries were just following the trend in East Europe or the conditionalities of the Western international financial institutions for foreign aid disbursement (World Bank, IMF)<sup>21</sup>.

The global emergence of liberal democracy, in the wake of the end of the Cold War, appealed mostly to the developing world nations since democracy gives to all citizens certain claims including legal *equality*, political participation, and constitutional rights. Democracy, thus, symbolized the best alternative possible to post-independence totalitarian regimes that characterized African regimes and found their justification in the concept of nation building along Nazi, Fascist, or Communist ideologies. Besides, the democratization process was seen almost as the panacea to corruption and injustices that hindered the continent's economic development. As democracy restored the people's participation in choosing their leaders, electoral processes came to represent the best way for punishing bad political leaders and replacing them with new and more promising ones. Elections are primarily the means through which citizens are called to participate in choosing the leaders they would like to have. That is, "political power is authorized and controlled by the people over whom it is exercised," to use Thomas Pogge's words<sup>22</sup>.

As such, elections are a unique opportunity for the people to either reward deserving politicians or punish them when they are not deserving. In campaign periods, incumbents return to their constituencies to ask for validation while new emerging candidates lure the voters by challenging the performance of the former. Both spend time, efforts, and resources to convince voters that they will meet their aspirations and hopes of a good living. With this in mind, one begins to fathom the *meaning of democracy* for the Congolese people whose history has been fraught with violence and atrocious treatment even from leaders.

21 Mohamed A. EL-KHAWAS and J. ANYU NDUBME, *Democracy, Diamonds and Oil : Politics in Today's Africa*. New York : Nova Science Publisher, 2006.

22 Thomas WINFRIED MENKO POGGE, *World Poverty and Human Rights : Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms*. Cambridge : Polity Press, (2010), 146.

However, a good and functioning democracy requires more than just elections. In fact, elections can be regular as we have seen in the DRC for the last fifteen years, but it is more important to have robust institutions that will maintain an uncompromising respect of the people's dignity and sovereignty, the guarantee of their fundamental rights protected by the constitution, the freedom of expression embodied through free press, a multi-party system, and an empowered civil society that vigilantly uphold a democratic culture to balance the interests of the state with those of the winning majority and the different minorities. Democratic changes, in the early 1990s, implied for Africans a breakup with and the liberation from military dictatorships, freedom from all kinds of oppression, and the rule by righteous principles that would guarantee, at last, a lasting peace and a just society wherein institutional arrangements allow for *fair distribution* of human worth, political power, and economic wealth.

### **3. The DRC's democratization experiment in context**

#### **3.1. Still haunted by its colonial past**

It is important, however, to begin with some historical perspective to understand the evolution of the current predicament of the Congolese democracy. Francois Dose underscores the importance of the past in shaping the present. He notes that "there is no existence of the present without the presence of the past [...] In the life of time, the past is certainly the heaviest presence, and so, possibly the richest. It is that presence which, in any case, is necessary to both feed on and distinguish oneself from<sup>23</sup>." In fact, almost a year before independence in 1960, Belgium's official rhetoric affirmed the desire of Europe to "raise the population of the Congo to a level that will enable them freely to choose their future destiny. As soon as they are mature, as soon as they have received the loving care in education that we can give them, we shall launch them forth on their own enterprise and independent existence<sup>24</sup>." Yet, Belgium withdrew from the Congo with irresponsible speed, a political move that tricked the Congolese people into unpreparedness to assume political self-determination as confirmed by King Baudouin's speech to his Ministers of February 18, 1960 (see the "Belgian Parliamentary investigation into Lumumba's assassination," p.622). Note the paternalistic language like in the expression "as soon as they mature." To follow the logic of the argument stated above, as the Congolese people have remained incapable of handling complex notions of politics and democracy, budget, and economy even after 75 years of Belgian colonization, it becomes evident that the colonization project was intended not to educate but to cripple the Congolese people.

23 François DOSSE, « Michel de Certeau et l'Écriture de l'Histoire », *Vingtième Siècle Revue de l'Histoire*, Vol. 2, No. 78, 2003, pp. 145-156.

24 Kevin C. DUNN, *Imagining the Congo*, 73.

The history of the D.R. Congo state shows a persistent pattern of violence against the Congolese people for economic gains of its leaders. This begins with King Leopold II's colonial rule. A shrewd politician, the king succeeded in a clever way to obtain the custody of the Congo at the Berlin Conference in 1885. As a matter of fact, when Europeans met in Berlin in 1884, their goal was to harmonize their respective interests and to resolve their competing claims about the newly discovered Congo River basin. The other issue on the agenda was to address the question of regulating the trade relations on the continent. France, Britain, Germany, Spain, and Portugal were all in competition with one another for access and control of African colonial territories. Given that they intended to keep the Congo River basin for collective exploitation, awarding its management to king Leopold II was a strategic move. By creating an "international colony" with the king of Belgium at its helm, the Conference allowed King Leopold to collapse his IAC into the Congo Free State (CFS). After receiving the Congo, the king of Belgium went on to use the state to meet his ambitions to exploit the Congo for commercial profit<sup>25</sup>.

The US had pledged to support decolonization of Africa after World War II. But the inception of the Cold War generated a convergence between US and its Western Europe allies. Indeed, the US had promised an unconditional support to Africa for self-determination against the colonial regime, a commitment cosigned in "The Atlantic Treaty" by President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill in the fall of 1941. As Europe was losing its global leadership and the US was rising to prominence after the Second World War, the later reversed its promise for political self-interest. The reversal to support the independence of colonized territories and their self-determination is illustrated in what Assistant Secretary of State for Near East, South Asian and African Affairs, Henry A. Byroads called an 'enlightened self-interest' when dealing with the colonial question. While addressing the World Affairs Council of North California at Asilomar, on October 31, 1953, in a speech entitled: "The World's Colonies and Ex-Colonies: A Challenge to America," he argued that the US should continue to support European colonial powers who happen to be "our allies" and who share "many common interests with us. In his words, "We cannot blindly disregard their side of the colonial question without injury to our own security" nor can we "forget the importance of these interests to the European economy which we have contributed so much to support"<sup>26</sup>."

25 Scholars who provide a historical background to King Leopold's colonial for-profit business in the Congo and the related atrocities as collateral damage include Ruth Mayer, *Artificial Africa: Colonial Images in Times of Globalization* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2002). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1902) provides a powerful allegory of colonial horrors and brutalities that happened in King Leopold II's Congo. See also Adam Hochschild's *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Pan Macmillan, 1998).

26 Henry A. Byroade, "The World's Colonies and Ex-Colonies: A Challenge to America," Address made before the World Affairs Council of Northern California at Asilomar, California, on October 30, 1953 (Department of State *Bulletin*, November 16, 1953, pp. 655-660).

A premature independence, he argued, could lead to a power vacuum, and invite internal disorder and external (Soviet) intervention.

As a result, throughout the Cold War period, the US deferred to former European colonial powers as they were the custodians of Western interests in Africa. Indeed, the US always sided with its European allies in case of difficult choices between African show of nationalist interests against Europe's postcolonial interests. But the world entered a new era showing democratization effervescence after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. As the winds were blowing everywhere from the dismantling of the USSR and eastern European newly found freedom, even African dictators who had come to power through military coups started feeling the heat of the popular democratic demands. Africa needed a change in leadership. By 1997, US officials were speaking of Africa's "new breed of leaders" capable of adapting to the neoliberal world order and the new foreign policy of the US in a unipolar global system. If during the Cold War years, wars were fought by proxy between the US and the USSR, in the post-Cold War period, competition for strategic resources and national security interests opposed former Western allies. As the Clinton administration reminded France, the days of claiming to have "chasse gardée" in a bygone Africa. Thus, helping install African leaders who have the US business interests in mind became a priority agenda of its foreign policy – as others before served to contain the spread of Communism.

### **3.2. Democracy as self-determination**

At the Round Table in Brussels in 1959 where the independence date was discussed and set, Belgians knew all too well this was not a viable solution to its economic interests. How could Belgium tell its subjects who had gone to invest in the Congo that they were to lose everything over night ? Thus, after setting the independence date to June 30, 1960, the Belgian government's greatest worry was how to reassure investors and protect their interests in the Congo ? Belgians, thus, convened a second *Round Table* from April 26 to May 16, 1960, whose goal consisted of neutralizing the effect of independence<sup>27</sup>. Lumumba discovered the ruse and, learning that the *Union Minière du Haut Katanga* (UMHK) – a multinational company – was the mastermind behind the idea of the Katanga secession, he went on to advocate for a strong centralized government. This was the beginning of the crisis that led to P.E. Lumumba's assassination in 1961. Belgium indeed continued projecting the Congo onto the international stage in the image of an immature political entity, which made it necessary to renew its presence by sending technocrats and army officers to assist the newly independent Congo in handling international affairs<sup>28</sup>. With the

27 Pierre Joyce et Rosine Lewin, *Les Trusts au Congo*. Bruxelles : Société Populaires d'éditions, 1961, p.297.

28 This argument is the most favored by social scientists to explain why Belgians ended colonial rule so quickly. Another explanation says that the Belgian government panicked in front of the growing

recent electoral fiasco, a 20-year presence of the UN peacekeeping mission with continued insecurity induced by invasions and militia groups begs the question whether the Congolese people are benefiting from this chaos or have politically matured enough to own their sovereignty and to exist as independent democratic nation.

On June 30, 1960, as King Baudouin denied Africans, in his handover independence speech, the ownership and interpretation of their colonial “experience” by stating the good done to the Congolese people during the colonial years. Using the dominant paradigm, King Baudouin was trying to justify and legitimize the necessity of colonialism. Nonetheless, the colonial paradigm had already started to erode, losing its rhetorical power, as a rationalization strategy of the West to implement its imperial project in the colonies. A short abstract from King Baudouin’s speech on the Congo’s Independence Day states that “The independence of Congo constitutes the culmination of the work conceived by the genius of King Leopold II, undertaken by Him with a tenacious courage and continued with perseverance by Belgium.”<sup>29</sup>

Lumumba’s impromptu response radically rejected this official rhetoric. To handle the trickery of the independence as best as he could, he sought to debunk the whole humanistic foundation of the colonial project. As Aimé Césaire had already argued in his Discourse on colonialism, colonization was neither a philanthropic project nor Christian humanitarian enterprise. It was an absurd violent project for the sake of economic exploitation, not aiming to develop Africa and its peoples. Some have, of course, argued that Lumumba’s political inexperience escalated the post-independence crisis in the Congo. Others agree that any ideal-driven politician in Lumumba’s shoes would have acted likewise. He hoped to set the record straight. However, one begins to appreciate and fathom the importance of political representation after looking closely at Lumumba’s response to King Baudouin’s well elaborate colonial rhetoric. Lumumba’s political sin was to reveal this clash of interests between western colonial objectives and Africa’s independence claims. Here is how P.E. Lumumba’s replied,

“Our lot was eighty years of colonial rule; our wounds are still too fresh and painful to be driven from our memory. We have known tiring labor exacted in exchange for salary, which did not allow us to satisfy our hunger, to clothe and lodge ourselves decently or to raise our children like loved beings. We have known ironies, insults, blows, which we had

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disorder and resentfulness of the indigenous population in the Congo. However, Henry L Bretton argues that it was the wish of the Belgians to foment disorder so as to reassert their own control. I.F. Stone has the same view when he claims that granting independence so abruptly and with little preparation would prove the native inaptitude to self-governance and lead them to welcome back the Belgian neocolonialist control. See, David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 77-79. Special reference to note 2 on page 236.

29 Kevin C. DUNN, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 66.

to endure morning, noon, and night because we were “Negroes.” We have known that our lands were spoiled... We have known that the law was never the same depending on whether it concerned white or Negro... We have known atrocious sufferings of those banished for political opinions or religious beliefs.”<sup>30</sup>

Some theories explained the early Congo’s political crisis by stigmatizing the paradigm of Africans’ inherent inability to rule themselves.<sup>31</sup> But historical evidence shows that Western economic interests significantly always undermined the independence and self-determination of the D.R. Congo as a political unit. In other words, while blaming the political amateurism of the Congolese elite, the external influence is non-negligible in accounting for the Congo’s economic development failure as well as the sabotaging of its political efforts for social integration since its independence.<sup>32</sup>

Also, the whole anti-communism rhetoric to explain the assassination of Lumumba was a mere pretext for getting rid of those who opposed Western economic interests in post-independent Africa. The assassination of Lumumba on January 17, 1961 was rather the result of a strong competition for the control of the Congo: its natural wealth, people, and future. In the West, the demonizing rhetoric was circulated to present Lumumba as the biggest danger for world peace, let alone the Congo’s future. Given the context of the Cold War, many US officials portrayed Lumumba as “a Castro or worse.” But it should be noted that there is no politics for the sake of politics. People organize into cities, with laws, courts, the police, and the military, to protect their wealth and economic interests. These external forces and interests have always preferred a weak and easily manipulated leadership to run the country. As a result, the young 35 years old Mobutu became president in 1965 and stayed in power for the next 32 years with the support of the West. He reigned unchallenged, the sole master of the land, in the image of King Leopold, this time trying to balance his self-aggrandized image with the interests of his Western godfathers in the US, France, and Belgium, with the blessing of the Cold War environment.

### **3.3. The Post-Cold War Context of the 1990s**

Many have argued that Africa’s rush toward democracy in the 1990s was mimicking the trends in Eastern Europe. But I want to argue that such arguments derive from old colonial tropes and representation of Africans. Indeed, Western asymmetries in hegemonic encounter with Africa have

30 See Alan P. MERRIAM, *Congo : Background to the Conflict* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1961), 352-4.

31 MWAYILA TSHIYEMBE, « L’Afrique face à l’État Multinational, » *Le Monde Diplomatique* (September, 2000), <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2000/09/TSHIYEMBE/14270>.

32 Albert KASANDA LEMEMBU, “La Mondialisation et la Résistance Culturelle en Afrique : Du Vertige d’une Utopie à la Tentation du Réalisme,” *Alternative Sud*, Vol. 7 (March, 2000) : 31-45.

not only produced the international context of political domination and economic exploitation but also still characterize the representation and interpretation of occurrences on the continent today. This reflects what V.Y. Mudimbe has termed as “epistemological violence” resulting from Western ethnocentrism<sup>33</sup>. Indeed, the legacy of colonial discourses and narratives not only accumulated the symbolic power to map or classify the world politics of Africans<sup>34</sup> but also to monopolize the whole system of representations<sup>35</sup>. To this extent, democratic aspirations are seen as alien to Africa cultures. As for the Congolese democracy, it is this already mapped and delineated Congo and Congolese identity that “modern” Africa inherited as a legacy of colonization, viewed through Joseph Conrad’s metaphor of the “Heart of Darkness,” that needs to be shattered<sup>36</sup>. For instance, the very ambivalent phrase, “Heart of Darkness,” which was intended to characterize the brutal rule of the Belgian colonial rule in Congo in Conrad’s perception has come to symbolize the darkness of a chaotic struggle for power and resources in Africa. It is true then that the problem of colonial – and postcolonial – representation has not yet been settled. When Ruth Meyer wrote her book in 2002, a century after the brutalities of King Leopold were starting to be denounced, she observed that although the parameters for approaching the messy layout of colonial interaction and its postcolonial extensions have changed, “in many respects matters seem to be as complicated as they were in 1902.” However, “the maxim of our day for approaching Africa seriously could be called facing the facts. If only we could agree on what the facts are<sup>37</sup>.”

This was the case in the Africa Great Lakes Region, for instance, when France tried to compete with the US by supporting a moribund Habyarima’s regime against the US backing of Kagame’s RPF. This new proxy battle for regime change, unfortunately, paved way to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. Two years later, the regime change policy migrated to Zaïre (now the DRC) as the aging and sickly Mobutu was no longer useful to advance the US

33 Epistemological violence is the ideological explanation forcing non-Western into Western system of representations, thus depriving them of their discursive power in order to legitimize the Western system of knowledge, which is in an interdependent relationship with systems of power and social control. It is the denial that knowledge is rooted in a life, a society, and a language that have a history in which knowledge exactly finds elements enabling it to communicate with other forms of life, other types of society, other significations. V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), 18-29.

34 Kevin C. Dunn, *Imagining the Congo: The International Relations of Identity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 14.

35 Ruth Mayer, *Artificial Africas: Colonial Images in Times of Globalization* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2002), p.173.

36 The use of now conventional terms like “modern Africa” refers to Western epistemological and ideological ethnocentrism. As Mudimbe observes about colonial discourses of power and knowledge, they propose an ideological explanation for forcing Africans into a new historical dimension. Instead of speaking about Africa and Africans, they justify “the process of inventing and conquering a continent and naming its primitiveness or disorder as well as the subsequent means of its exploitation and methods for its regeneration.” See, V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, 20.

37 Ruth Mayer, *Artificial Africas*, 173-4.

interests in the new global economic order. Thus, it could be argued that the geopolitical reordering of the 1990s presided over the inception of regime change in Africa's Great Lakes Region but also initiated business diplomacy, whereby trade bureaus were established in most Western embassies to negotiate business contracts in host countries. African leaders who appeared less friendly to Western interests could simply get ousted as in the case of Congo-Brazzaville democratically elected president Pascal Lissouba. It is no secret that the French Oil Companies Elf and Total armed the rebels to begin a brutal civil war ; killed the young democracy ; and brought back to power president Denis Sassou Nguesso who understood better how to protect the French interests<sup>38</sup>. The moral value of lives lost in Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, in the DRC during the many years of protracted civil wars, in Burundi or in Congo-Brazzaville could be labeled as mere collateral damage to the international players rewriting of the African place in the new global geopolitical order where Western powers fight one another for influence and control of strategic resources. The regime Change in the DRC took place in 1997 when Laurent Désiré Kabila, with the help of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, with the blessing of the US was installed as president.

During the 1990s, several armed conflicts torn the country into pieces, especially between 1998 and 2003<sup>39</sup>. After Mobutu's April 24, 1990 speech liberalizing the political space in the DRC, and following both the domestic demands and the international pressure, a year and half of national palaver followed between 1990 and 1992 to discuss the evils of the Congolese politics. The Conférence Nationale Souveraine (CNS), as it was called, brought together delegates representing the different segments of the population from all regions and the diaspora, including the political parties, civil society, religious confessions, professional groups, and even the military, to find a consensus – a new social contract – for the future of the country. It should be noted that the National Conferences that took place in a number of Francophone African states was the real African contribution to the democratization process. The result in some countries like in Benin was laudable. In the DRC, unfortunately, after it established a diagnosis of the political crisis and drafting the Constitution of the Third Republic, Mobutu snatched away the claim of its sovereignty prolonging the transition period and concomitantly perpetuating the crisis of legitimacy. It was in this context that a rebellion was launched in the eastern province of South Kivu in October 1996.

38 Rémy BAZENGUISSA-GANGA, "The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville." *African Affairs*, Vol. 98, No. 390 (Jan., 1999), pp. 37-54.

39 The *Human Security Report 2005: War and Peace in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York, Oxford Canada) claims that the 1990s was the least violent decade since the end of World War II although it recognizes that the nature of violence changed. See also Andreas Wenges and Daniel Mockli, *Conflict Prevention: The Untapped Potential of the Business Sector* (London: Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2002).

With the veneer of local figurehead, The *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) – an umbrella of rebel movements from the Congo and the neighboring Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi – succeeded in toppling the long-reigning and ill-fated president Mobutu Sese Seko who fled a country he had ruled for 32 years. On May 17, 1997, he went into exile in Morocco where he died few months later, on September 7, 1997. The Congolese have always opposed the repatriation of his remains. Yet, there seems to be a striking parallel between Emery Patrice Lumumba, the first democratically elected Prime Minister of the newly independent Democratic Republic of the Congo and Laurent Désiré Kabila who, though he came to power undemocratically on May 17, 1997, was assassinated while in office in 2001. While the political convulsions of the early 1960s reflected the framework of the Cold War competition and Western neocolonial project in Africa, the early years of the new Millennium saw the rise of China as a competitor to the West and Laurent Kabila was dangerously distancing himself from the West and getting closer to China.

In other words, while the Cold War ideology provided the framework for interpreting the crisis surrounding the Congo's independence in the early 1960s, the critical juncture of the 2000s and the globalization paradigm can help understand why the nationalism of Laurent Kabila represented a threat to Western interests in the Congo. After his assassination, the son was sworn in. Aware of who helped him to become the head of a rich state the size of Western Europe at a tender political age, Joseph Kabila learned to consolidate his own control of and grip onto power. After 15 years in power, he had acquired a special presidential guard (almost a private militia) where the national military institution is neglected; national funds are used for his business investments to benefit relatives and cronies, while most Congolese people suffer from dire poverty, let alone the levels of insecurity where Congolese people are exposed to militia's brutalities, and epidemics such as Ebola, and other forms of atrocities explain why the Congolese people have invested so much faith in democracy. "Kabila and his siblings have assembled an international business network stretching across at least 70 companies, according to a Bloomberg News analysis of thousands of company documents and court filings as well as dozens of interviews with bankers, businessmen, miners, farmers and former government officials<sup>40</sup>."

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40 MICHAEL J Kavanagh, Thomas Wilson, and Franz Wild, "With His Family's Fortune at Stake, President Kabila Digs In.", available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2016-12-15/with-his-family-fortune-at-stake-congo-president-kabila-digs-in>.

## Conclusion

After interrogating the meaning, evolution, and application of the concept of democracy in different contexts and historical periods, I come to an enlightened optimism that democracy in Africa is *en route* and well alive in Africa. This optimism suggests the sacralization of democratic values, a vigilant citizenry, and institutional framework to avoid the political unpredictability rooted in erratic and arbitrary abuse of power. As it has always been since the country's accession to independence on June 30, 1960, my main contention is that we cannot dismiss the fact that serious inroads have been made in the democratic progress in the history of the DRC. While the pattern of the Congolese politics since the colonial rule tend to negate the fundamental right of the natives to own and enjoy the wealth of their land, and despite the history of denying elected leaders their right to rule, I believe that applying a different lens to the interpretation of the democratic experiment and using a different measurement will allow us to appreciate the long way travelled by the DRC's democratic experiment.

Lessons and recommendations derived from the recent electoral experience in the DRC therefore would concern the critical importance of the support shown by the international community, organizations, and nations to the Congolese people. The American sanctions against CENI and government officials in the Congo are a form of vindication – although symbolic – for the meaning the people attach to the election process in legitimizing power and creating stable institutions. The image of the population in Ebola-stricken areas of Beni defying the ban to vote and organizing a local “symbolic” election that would not tally toward the general results is very telling<sup>41</sup>. Post-electoral crises in most African countries erupt when the sovereign of the people is scorned by the incumbent regime with impunity.

Besides the meaning attached to the voting process, the use of the voting machines in the Congo has sent a poor message about technology. While the information technology and the social media have become the alternative space for freedom of expression, it was expected that the use of voting machines in the DRC was for the purpose of transparency. Instead, the regime used them to cheat and rig the election. It is of critical importance that a neutral and well-trained IT management team be composed of political parties and the civil society's representatives. Not only full disclosure of the polling centers tallying minutes has to be made available, but the CENI also needs to prove its independence by proclaiming the votes in an open manner, center by center and region by region. For as much as democracy is about the sovereignty of the people, it is also

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41 Cf. Christian MUKADI ILUNGA, « Les populations de Beni et de Butembo (RD Congo) ou le courage de la lutte pour la démocratie », in *Congo-Afrique* n°532, February 2019, 137-144.

about the independence of the institutions. For instance, the Congolese Constitutional Court could call for a recount of the votes before proclaiming the true winner. By emulating what Kenyan Chief Justice David Maraga did in September 2017 after evidence of rigging could have strengthened the Congolese democratic institutions.

There is growing political consciousness and a sense of nationhood and political participation seen through the DRC's civil society organizations. This suggests formation of political coalitions and integration in the country beyond ethnic lines. Thanks to the national awareness, the Congolese people voted indeed beyond ethnic lines. The Catholic Church has been a major actor in education and other social provision – but more importantly, in civic education. It is impossible that the Congo can claim not having money to organize elections. If there is transparency in the country's budget – resources in taxation of both citizens and companies – and spending by government agencies, in five years the country would have set aside enough money for organizing elections.

Those concerned with the future of democracy in Africa, and with helping the DRC in particular, should take former US president (Barack OBAMA) advice seriously. For what Africa needs the most is strong institutions and not “strong men.” If each democratic institution used its constitutional right and independence, and if every citizen would stand for their conscience to defend their civic rights, then both the CENI and the Constitutional Court in the DRC would have served the truth of the polls and thus contribute to the progress of democracy in the DRC and in Africa. ■



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