

# The identity of the heritage and the memory of the identity: Lumumba as the Messiah of the Kasaian from Katanga<sup>1</sup>

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Un espace de la critique libre est ainsi établi où s'opère une progressive politisation [...] de pratiques culturelles que l'État avait un temps captées à son profit - ou qui étaient nées, en réaction à son emprise, dans la sphère du privé.

In the popular culture of Zaire the presence of a painting on canvas implies that one finds oneself in the living room, that is to say a bourgeois appropriation of a public space. The ownership of the painting sets apart the individual from the 'community'. The living room, signified by the painting, displays a person's right to let into this space only selected members of the community. The living room is a part of the public space previously open to the community but now controlled by an individual. The control of this space allows him to be seen as a public person. He feels he is an individual and is recognized as one not because he is above the community but precisely because he is the master of the public space, even if it is only a very tiny part of it. The living room, and thus the painting, confirm his quality of individual.

The Zairian popular painting already contains in itself the contradiction of interpretations due to the strong dual unity of meanings - the subject/object on one side and representation/story on the other. Paintings tell us about the public expression of the political identity of a person, about the production of the community-destiny, about the representation of its historic mission. At the same time, however, paintings are 'read' by people in the context of political and social events. Thus, they are also open to the possibility of a deep transformation of meanings, to the production of a subversive speech. They offer a dialogic space for reading politics outside the institutional framework. Almost fifteen years ago Michel de Certeau wrote:

Plus audacieuse et aussi, finalement, plus lucide, en matière de savoir, est la politique qui décèle dans la diversité des signes le symbole d'un mouvement général et donc l'indice d'une réorganisation à entreprendre.

## **Representation and identity**

In Zaire, throughout the 1970s and the 1980s, the painting was a sort of business card, a means of affirming the adherence of its owner to 'modernity'. The painted portrait, always based on a photograph, is the 'official'

representation of the master of the house. It is to be found hanging on the living room wall next to the refrigerator or freezer, besides the sideboard with enamelled pans, near the television set, etc. It confirms one's modernization as an individual, one's success in the post-colonial bureau-technocratic world, one's mastery of the laws and customs of the modern world.

In a system endowed with authoritarian political signs, paintings can produce meanings on the basis of a reversal of the political value of conventional signs. The domains of discourse and its assigned space-time are produced in the universe of modern Zairian syncretic Christianity, its ethics and its aesthetic. Let us take, for example, the fact of eroticism. Its expressions are banished from the living room area, because it is a public space for the production and affirmation of family values. As the affirmation of these values constitutes the political community representation, the living room becomes a political space for the construction of an identity. In the living room, a man exposes his accomplishments as a member of a political community - called in this case, an ethnic group -, as the head of the 'modern' family - that is to say, monogamous -, and as a father of many children. These children can be by different women, married to him or not; but still, they make up his family, establishing the man as its head, a political persona. Even if the man does not worry about the nature of the relationships from which his children are born (which is not true for women for whom official proof of belonging to a man is an administrative requirement), a monogamous marriage is necessary in theory, in order to become the political subject. It is a symbol of belonging to 'modernity'. This is why people hang their wedding photograph or painting on the living room wall. The living room denotes the man as an influential person who takes pride in his public career and his material success. It is also a place where the man is accepted, as one who manifests a sense of belonging and his adherence to a group that anthropology defines as 'ethnic'. This is the purpose for hanging on the wall paintings of generic African landscapes or villages and other curios from the tourist market; through the 'modernness' of this market, these objects express the 'modern' character of urban ethnic culture.

On the other hand, there is the public space of a bar or a street, where men can flaunt their sexuality, their conquests, and where they can show their social status by the amount of money they spend. Man affronts this alone, as an individual whose identity as a political subject is challenged by every encounter with the objects of his conquests - women, material symbols of success, and by his rivals, other men. I do not intend to say that it is an atmosphere of equality, but it is a capitalist market, since in the public space anything is possible and acceptable, providing that it leads to one's self affirmation. Bluffing about the amount of money that one pretends to have, one's relationships, one's political standing, the divine mission one is endowed with, the recourse to sorcery, the latest fashion styles, the art of speech, and the manipulation of women, are all excellent tools in this very political game. It is above all, the marketplace where everything is for sale, as is stated by the

players themselves. In his famous speech on the 'Zairian evil', President Mobutu said: 'Steal if you can, but do it expertly, little by little, and don't get caught'. The rules of this game are similar to those of Russian roulette. The majority of men, but especially women, who enter into it - some strive to build up a comfortable position - use more tactics than mere strategy (see the definition given by M. de Certeau). Those who strive however to secure a strategic position and to act from a position of strength, are capable of giving themselves a long term advantage. They are thus able to leave a vicious circle of good luck and bad luck, the fate of ordinary men and women which is well represented in the paintings of *mami wata*, also called *mamba muntu* (mermaid).

The recognized public space-time situates itself in the living room. The politics of the identity that are played there are articulated by Christian knowledge and by 'traditional' knowledge (which really means colonial village's knowledge), shaped by the ethnographic monograph which is usually written by a missionary. Mudimbe calls it the 'Belgian ethnographic library'. One's identity is thus produced and exhibited with approval by not only the Occidental knowledge which normalized the Other, but also by the Christian syncretism which traces a clear frontier between Us and Others, the believers and the pagans, those who belong and those who do not. In the identities which the painting represents, the expressions of belonging are complimentary, seeing that the definition of one is impossible without the other, yet at the same time, they are antinomic. The 'modernity' of the colonial and post-colonial knowledge is presented as opposing the uncultivated and rural life of the contemporary village, while the 'tradition' sets itself up in the ethnographic present. 'Tradition' and 'modernity' each assume their own representation: the native village on the one hand, and the 'Belgian colony' or 'civil war' on the other. Each of these representations exhibit certain symbols: nature, simple tools, hand-made clothes, and conversely, modern weapons, flags, uniforms and ordinary men crushed by authority and strength. In the 'Belgian colony', the painting represents the hierarchical order, which means not only the state order, but also the modern patriarchal one, therefore helping to put the portrait in the register of 'modernity'. The master of the house has his 'modernity' confirmed with the help of the image, striving to be more photographic than the mechanical original, presenting thus an improved image of the real life. It makes the represented person an *alter ego* of the colonial functionary - of authority itself.

## **History and memory**

It is in this grammar of the representations of the identity, that one must examine the passion paintings of Lumumba, in which he is depicted as Jesus Christ. At first glance, it is a surprising discourse about the Luba Kasai's or Katanga's ethnic identity.



*Passion painting of Lumumba.*

Lumumba's image as the African political leader, able to make true the dream of full independence and of real dignity to his people, replaced the real historical figure of Lumumba. The memory of Lumumba as the incarnation of real independence, which was stolen from the African people by the neo-colonial West as well as by corrupt African leaders, was widely used by all radical movements in Africa and in the West. The political myth of Lumumba cannot be separated from Zairian political memory, especially because the real Lumumba is largely absent from Zairian history. In his recent book, Jean-Claude Williame offers an excellent analysis of both Lumumba's political myth and Patrice Emery Lumumba as a Congolese politician during the short period between 1958 and 1960. Lumumba only played a role in the political struggle for independence and for the unitary Congolese State during one year. He was prime minister for little more than two months. Lumumba's supposed political radicalism (anticlericalism, procommunism) during this very short period is much more the product of his political enemies' selection of some of his speeches and of some of his political gestures, than of the reality of his programme.

In fact, Lumumba had no time to implement any programme. He died before having had the opportunity to move from the internal struggle for power to political practice. Both his very short political life and his death still remain a mystery to us. Thus they have been reconstructed by many political figures after him. Even the recent Zairian National Conference (the *Conférence Nationale Souveraine*; in 1971 country president General Mobutu

changed the name Congo to Zaire), which is the longest of all African conferences leading from dictatorship to democracy, was not able to clearly establish the political and criminal circumstances of Lumumba's assassination in today's Lubumbashi (then Elizabethville).

Here we have the first reason why Lumumba's political life can be so easily turned into a political myth and why he can be the incarnation of the people's dreams about their own welfare state, which was promised at the independence but was never delivered. In this respect, Lumumba is a symbol of a leader who really cared about the people, and as such he is also an implicit accusation of all other politicians who turned the state into a tool for the accumulation of personal wealth.

The second reason of Lumumba's central position in popular political imagination is his stubborn struggle for the unitary state. In 1960, the attempts to implement a centralized unitary state proved almost impossible. They were the origin of a generally shared popular hostility towards Lumumba in many parts of the Congo, especially in Katanga and in Kasai. Nevertheless, the country's history after Lumumba's death, and the political manipulations of ethnicity and regionalism by president Mobutu, turned Lumumba for many Zairians into a symbol of democracy and social and political security. Paradoxically, Lumumba is in this respect an invocation of the nationalized *pax Belgica*.

### **Lumumba as wrongdoer or saviour**

In 1960, in both regions concerned in this paper, Lumumba was perceived rather as a political evil than as political hero. He was strongly opposed to the Katanga secession. Being unable to incite Western political and military action against it as quickly as he wished, he sent the national army to put down the secession. As the Kasai region is on the way from the national capital to Katanga, and as for many reasons the Eastern part of this region was as hostile to his politics of a unitary state as were the Katanga, the transit of the army to Katanga turned into a struggle. Thus in the early 1960s Lumumba became unpopular with both the secessionist political forces in Katanga and the Luba people in Kasai. The latter were represented by Albert Kalondji, who shortly afterwards proclaimed the autonomy of Eastern Kasai under his own leadership.

For more than thirty years, the Katanga mining industry has been recruiting the labour force in Kasai. As the result of this process, in the 1950s Katanga natives complained about too large a representation of Kasaians in well-paid jobs and colonial administration in Katanga. The autonomy of Katanga, which was a longstanding demand of white settlers, resulted in 1960 in a local political program calling for 'Katanga for Katangans only'. Its immediate effect was the expulsion of Kasaians from many industrial cities. The death of Lumumba took place during this very confused political period. Kasaians expelled from Katanga lived under the protection of UN forces,

which acted on the behalf of the central state. They still associated the central state with Lumumba, even though he was dead now, and, furthermore, had been both opposed to the autonomy of their home region (Kasai) and the political way they survived in Katanga.

To make the situation even more confusing, the lubaphone inhabitants of the northern part of Katanga spoke the same language as many Kasaians working in Southern mining industry and shared with them common precolonial historical narratives. These groups have been opposed to the Katanga secession and were strongly pro-Lumumbist.

It is against this historical background that the construction of Lumumba as the Messiah of Zairian politics came about. With the substantial help of UN forces, the Katanga secession was put down, while also the Kasaiian autonomy proved impossible to defend. After Mobutu's coup d'état in 1965 and the imposition of a very centralized political system, the country experienced a short period of improvement due to the high demand for copper that was the consequence of the Vietnam War. Almost all Kasaians that were expelled from Katanga to Eastern Kasai in 1960, came back and resumed their work in the mining industry. Mobutu, who was suspicious of both regions, Katanga and Eastern Kasai, where the mining wealth of Zaire is located (copper, cobalt and diamonds), did his best to oppose any political bourgeoisie that came from those two regions.

Historically speaking, the Kasaiian memory that should have been kept of Lumumba is one that represents the radical and violent negation of the Luba's very survival in their home region 'Kasai'. The reason for this is that in August 1960, as Prime Minister of the young unitary Congolese state, still in the shoes of the colonial administration, Lumumba sent troops to Kasai - the troops that the Luba found guilty of 'ethnic genocide'.

And yet, the modern memory of Luba Kasai of Katanga, the memory of a group deeply associated with the industrialization and with modern Christian education, is detached from the past that was lived and remembered by those who experienced the Kasai civil war and Congolese army intervention. For those who were forced to flee the urban areas, native villages had turned out to be hostile places. In life stories, these presented themselves as a new tribe, Bena Cymiangi (the Immigrants) faced with the village elders' rapacity and hostility, instead of the expected harmony and solidarity that proved nothing but an ethnographic *cliché*.

There is thus a double telescopic memory, in which Lumumba wore the mythical clothing of a saviour. He died in Katanga on January 17, 1961, a victim of the hostile Katangan secessionist leaders, as had so many Luba Kasai working for the mining industry there. Many had survived due to the efforts of the United Nations peace keeping troops, favourable to the Central Government of which Lumumba had been Prime Minister. The reverence for the Congolese Unitarian hero turned into an opposition symbol against the present day regime, primarily because of the responsibility that Mobutu, the current president had in Lumumba's violent death. Furthermore, Mobutu's hostility and general policies against the Luba, which systematically excluded

them from access to high political functions, did little to abate this feeling of animosity for the present regime. Thus, in the Luba Kasai of Katanga identity discourse, Lumumba, the martyr of the Zairian state unity, had come to symbolize the martyrology of this group at the hands of the Katangese and also those of Mobutu.

The appropriation of Lumumba by the narrative of this socio-professional group identity (in Zairian political culture they cannot present themselves as anything but an ethnic group), is also a refusal to accept Lumumba as the hero of Mobutu's Second Republic. In search for national unity and a symbol of historical continuity, for a very short time, Mobutu proclaimed Lumumba a national hero and even started building his monument in Kinshasa. The idea was abandoned quickly. Shortly after, anyone found to be in the possession of Lumumba's portrait could be accused of subversion. It is also possible, that for the Luba, the election of Lumumba as a hero was a way of rejecting Mobutu's self-proclamation as the Luba's saviour. He pretended that as Chief of Staff of the Congolese Army, he had put an end to this 'ethnic genocide'.<sup>2</sup>

Of all these speculations, which are very plausible but impossible to prove, one conclusion is certain. In the early 1970s, Lumumba, as the central figure of the Luba Kasai of Katanga martyrology, was the unique symbol that could stand up against explicit efforts of the Zairian party-state officials to present Mobutu as the Zairian Messiah. Lumumba depicted as Jesus Christ is a political representation in the popular culture at Luba Kasai of Katanga that refuses to grant to Mobutu this saviour image. As such, this painting is the antinomy of Mobutu's political image.

### **Christian education, modernity and ethnicity**

Why is it that the Christian representation of the national martyr, Lumumba, turns into a representation of Christ living out his passion in the martyrology of the Luba Kasai of Katanga? The actualization of Christian hagiography is the work of syncretic churches throughout Africa, whereby the context and the appearance of the characters is wholly Africanized. For instance, popular paintings easily place the 'Way of the Cross' in a contemporary African town with a poor black man as Christ. The anachronism renders the Christian argument more pertinent for the present reality. It is not surprising, therefore, that Christ is used as a symbol in politics or that Lumumba is seen as the Messiah. The willingness to 'modernize' the argument through Christian imagery is particular to popular Christianity in Africa.

In the case of the narrative identity and its Luba Kasai memory, especially in Katanga, there is an additional reason that makes up the very essence of the Passion of Christ the narrative model of the confirmation of modern ethnicity. The personage of Lumumba hides, yet also realizes another, that of Charles Mbuya, the first Luba Roman Catholic priest. The present day oral tradition believes he was killed by white missionaries resolved to prevent

the Luba ascension to 'modernity'. I strongly believe that this is an anachronistic transfer of Mbuya's story in response to the Belgian administration which, during the late 1950s, switched its support from Luba to Lulua.

Charles Mbuya, a priest ordained in 1934, has become, in the narrative of the Luba Kasai identity, a sort of Tower of Babel: thanks to him, the Kasaians almost reached God, whereas his death announced the approaching end of unity, resulting from the Belgian conspiracy. The priest Mbuya died in 1945, and less than ten years after the Belgians had begun helping the ethnic affirmation of Lulua. Luba and Lulua are culturally very close and speak the same language. Mbuya was ordained at Mikalayi-Saint-Joseph, otherwise known as Luluabourg-Saint-Joseph, at the time when the adjacent administrative center was overwhelmingly populated by Luba immigrants. The local rural population, who at the end of 19th century belonged to Lulua polity, distrusted the colonizers up to the end of the Second World War. The anti-Luba reactions of local Lulua population, struggling then for access to the modern job market and to the local administration positions, led in 1959 to a bloody civil war. Having lost the war, the Luba departed towards the oriental part of the Kasai region, designated henceforth as their homeland where they met Luba Kasai refugees from Katanga.

Let us examine the role of the Scheut missionaries' education and their influence upon the construction of the modern narrative of the Luba Kasai's identity. At the end of the 19th century, the missionaries' installation and the intervention of the troops of the Congo Free State, offered to a part of the Kasaiian population, mainly but not exclusively the Luba speakers, protection against armed gangs coming in from the east and the south. For more than twenty years the Christian villages founded and protected by the Catholic Church offered the possibility of rebuilding the communities. Those living there were, from the beginning, exposed to the missionary standardization of their language and culture. Catholic and Protestant missionaries elaborated two written standards of the Luba language, which was used for evangelization and for education. The colonial administration and commerce adopted the Catholic standard as the regional *lingua franca*. It was followed by the progressive codification of customs compatible with a Christian faith, selecting some cultural elements for preservation as ethnic heritage. Many men who had found shelter in the Christian villages, became catechists and teachers employed by the missionary system. and apostles of the new culture and the new identity. Later, many of them progressively left the Church's service for more lucrative jobs offered by the colonial state, by commerce, and by industry, yet still remaining members of the Christian community.

Since 1914, the magazine *Nkuruse* has been published by the Scheut mission for this new modern Christian Luba speaking elite. It presents them with a model of the identity construction based on the ethnic example of *Bena Kristo*, the Christian tribe. This magazine also served as a model for the articulation of both the ethnic identity and the memory. The *Bena Kristo*



became for the Christians of Kasai, who spoke the Luba language and who followed the Catholic standard, the model for their ethnic memory. The Catholics introduced many concepts from the Western languages in order to create a unique vocabulary of local Christianity, opposed to the pagan culture. On the other hand, the Protestants coined these same concepts from the Luba terms by describing the Christian symbols, for instance, a cross is rendered by a twisted tree. It is useful to remember that protestant missions have been very active among local populations who in the 1950s have declared themselves Lulua.

The Catholic approach offers the instruments and the model of the modern narrative of the identity which, to be politically acceptable in the colonial time, must also have been ethnic as far as the Africans go. The Christians and the Pagans, the Catholics and the Protestants, the White and the Blacks, are all manichaeic categories which have shaped the modern ethnic identities in Zaire.

Numerous recruits (hundreds of thousands) from Kasai, many of them Luba speakers, make up the industrial Katanga work force. In the mining industry centers, they live, work, and are educated in a workers camp. Their children are taught Swahili while keeping Luba as the family language. For those born in the camps, there is no other natal village than that of the work camp, nor any other religion besides Christianity. However, the dominating ideology imposed on all Blacks was another identity, that of the natal village, meaning the village of their fathers.

At the end of the 1950s, and it happened again in the 1990s, the Katangese Lunda as well as the Luba speakers from Northern Katanga, turned against the Kasaians, presenting them as wicked thieves of jobs and the privileged of the colonial regime. The Katangese secession meant for them the start of period of roaming. Obligated to flee from cities, some of them started looking for their natal villages in the oriental Kasai, where they met those who had to leave Luluaubourg. None of them seemed at home there, and they returned to Katanga as soon as the rebuilt unitary state offered them security. But the state, born from the 1965 coup by Mobutu, periodically discriminated against them in the labour market, in politics, and in educational opportunities, giving them a somewhat limited citizenship leading towards an ambivalent identity. They wanted to be Katangans of Kasaiian roots, but recent politics restricted them to the Kasaiian identity. The young generation born in Katangese cities felt, for the most part, Zairians from Katanga, but with the exception of their duties as citizens, the state and their fellow citizens did not accept this claim, imposing upon them an identity determined by their ancestral village. If they hated the regime, their security in Katanga depended on the survival of the central state, and they knew that returning to Eastern Kasai would be difficult because the region already was overpopulated, had no industrial infrastructure, no universities, etc.

Being Christians they could not escape the idea of being represented in the Bible as the people of Israel and living out their modern history through the Old Testament. Besides, the Belgians had already compared them to the

Jews, because of their success in small businesses and due to their, by colonial standards, high level of education. They thought of themselves as Whites among the Blacks, whereas today, other Zairians designate them as non-Zairians. A well known joke recounts that in a traffic accident in Kinshasa, there were three victims, two Zairians and one Luba. Thus it is the figure of Charles Mbuya, the messiah said to be treacherously killed by the jealous whites, reincarnated in Patrice Lumumba, who became the national hero and the Kasaian messiah who can never return.

Let us compare the two stories of the Passion of Charles Mbuya. The first one appeared in 1934, in *Nkuruse*, but should have been previously accepted by the extremely severe missionary censors. The second one still lives in the form of a song honoring this Luba priest. The song seems to be composed initially in 1934, but there is no transcription of it. I have two versions collected during the 1980s. It is possible that the song, which fell into oblivion after World War II, became relevant again at the end of the 1950s, first in the context of the civil war in Kasai, and then during the discrimination against the Lubas in the political life of the Second Republic. It is important to remember that this exclusion seems to have contributed to the heavy presence (in relation to their numeric importance in the total population) of Luba speakers among the high dignitaries of the Zairian Catholic Church.

In this context, it is possible to understand how and why the Passion of Lumumba became both the vehicle and the representation of the narrative of the Luba Kasai of Katanga identity during the 1970s and 1980s. Today, they have found a new contemporary messiah in the form of a national political leader, the main adversary of Mobutu, Tshisekedi.

### **The story of the ordination of Charles Mbuya**

You, the young generation, let it be known that the Priest Charles Mbuya has opened up a passage for you, follow him to save your black brothers so that they won't miss the salvation which our Saviour brings.

No, no, Father. You're right. It is thus astonishment that will be great when Blacks like us will take in hand this responsibility. Our dear priest, how many people have wagered on your calling. No-one believes that you will end up there. Everyone dreads it. Mikalayi, the mission, and all the Kasayi were offended by the laughs heard from all around you. Now, we dance a rejoiceful step. Can we still push around the Kasayi, making them the subject of ours jokes? You are the first pillar of his honorability. The Lord God who had lifted up his head, has now turned his attention to us, the Kasaian inhabitants and has recognized that we too are men.

You are our Moses, who God has given us in the example of Paul, who was given to the Israelites. You are our Messiah promised for a long time. The political wisdom says that 'it is only when one of ours is at the mortar that you can eat the grain from there'. Among the servants of God, there was no-one of our blood, only people from elsewhere. Now the Kasai has its chance. He has planted his totem pole.

**The song in honor of Charles Mbuya; extracts**

Oh yaye, yaye ele yaye!  
Nous sommes accompagnés par un médecin  
Détenteur d'un diplôme  
Ce diplômé en médecine

Dispose de médicaments efficaces.  
Si on vous donne une piqûre  
Ça guérit la maladie.  
Oh notre regretté Mukwa Bumbal  
Il ne devrait pas mourir.  
Oh l'abbé Mukwa Bumba!  
Pourquoi ces râlements?  
Oh notre regretté Mukwa Bumba,  
Donc vous gémissiez pendant la maladie?  
Oh notre regretté Mukwa Bumba!  
On a sonné pour la messe.  
Oh l'abbé Mukwa Bumba!  
Levez-vous alors et rendons-nous à la messe.

Oh l'abbé Mukwa Bumba  
Qui avait terminé toutes ses études!  
Oh notre regretté Mukwa Bumba  
Qui avait décroché un diplôme!  
Oh l'abbé Mukwa Bumba,  
La tour d'une cathédrale en or!  
Oh notre regretté Mukwa Bumba,  
La représentation du pape!

Il se réveilla le matin  
En disant aux élèves,  
Je m'en vais à Mikalayi  
Car je ne me sens pas bien  
Il prit un livre  
Il prit un chapelet  
Il prit place à bord d'un véhicule  
Et le véhicule démarra!

*Bogumil Jewsiewicki*

A la mort de Mukawa Bumba Mbuya.  
Qu'est-ce qu'il vous avait recommandé?  
Ne me pleurez pas dans l'épopée  
Ni dans les calebasses  
Pleurez-moi plutot par des livres  
Pleurez-moi par le chapelet.<sup>3</sup>

### **Conclusion: Lumumba's passion as Christ and the market as a paradigm of modernity**

Let us conclude by stressing the mutual reinforcement of the two grammars through the association of a specific object with a given narrative construction. The first grammar secularizes the Christian representation of the chosen people, while the other one transforms the collective memory of the identity into the expression of the individual's belonging. Both are woven into a 'portable' political mystery, which everyone can play again by himself, still knowing that others are likely to do the same, just like a popular tune heard on someone's walkman. It seems to me that the ethnic-political memory results from the strain between the revelation (secularized, it turns out to be a self-revelation), and the collective political subject. These two are related by the body of people who uphold the self-revelation of the idea.

The theme of Lumumba's death as the secular passion of Christ is directly related to the idea of divine election and thus the obligation of supporting the national or ethnic cause. The preservation of both the identity and the memory is thus not a question of politics, but God's mystery.

The grammar of the discourse itself produces a unique political being, a providential creation which does not have to be and which cannot equal or be compared with any other, and which can learn nothing from any other, since the experience of a providential election can only be unique. If need be due to the fact that only one true messiah can exist, there is only one authentic nation, one authentic ethnic identity, the others being merely usurpers. Thus, there is no room for a social identity such as class which is the 'objective' condition of Luba Kasai in urban Katanga. Instead they are perceived and feel that they are an ethnic group.

It is difficult to seize the hows and whys, the 'mystery' of the memory and identity, put on the political stage by an object, an implicit narrative about one's duty to preserve the identity of one's national or ethnic memory remains consistent with the political attitudes of the society of individuals (N. Elias). Is the nation a mystical passion, played out by individuals thinking of themselves as free, a relevant competitive advantage on the national or global market?

The participation in this secularized Christian mystery is conveyed by fresh support in a different way, in accordance with today's popular media culture. One does not need to meet with others in a given place in order to have a ritual performed, the mystery of belonging to the elected people can be replayed thanks to a CD like object. Anytime someone needs it, he or she can

be listening to the voice, watching an image carried by the narrative and by the object that she, he, or someone else exhibits. It is the same as like enjoying a popular tune on one's walkman knowing that you have both solitude and communion.

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### **Notes:**

1. Research for this article was done thanks to the SSRC of Canada. It was written during the author's fellowship at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
2. Willame, *Chronique*.
3. Tshijuke, 'l'histoire religieuse', 132-134.