

Luca Jourdan  
University of Bologna  
jourdan@libero.it

Work in progress, suggestions are welcome

**MAYI-MAYI: YOUNG REBELS IN KIVU**  
(DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO)

Luca Jourdan

**1. Introduction**

Mayi-Mayi are one of the most important armed movements involved in the war which has ravaged the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo – North Kivu and South Kivu - in the last decade. In Congolese Kiswahili, the term Mayi-Mayi, means “water-water” and it refers to the most important ritual performed by the movement. This ritual consists of sprinkling young soldiers with a “magic water”, the *mayi*, that is believed to protect warriors from bullets.

There are at least two reasons for the importance of this armed movement: on the first hand Mayi-Mayi controlled most of the rural regions in Kivu; on the second hand tens of thousands of young people and children enrolled in this movement. In East Congo the enrolment in rural militias responds to a complete lack of alternatives of social and economic integration as well as to a lack of security. A strong point in the Mayi-Mayi phenomenon is the role of war rituals and symbolism: the *mayi* is prepared by *docteurs*, who in most of the cases are children, and the combatants have to respect many rules if they want the water to be effective. These symbols and practices, widely documented also in other African contexts, compensate for the scarcity of modern weapons. At the same time the ritual discourse constitutes an effective strategy of mobilisation, which favours the enrolment of young recruits attracted by the possibility to affirm themselves and have access to new sources of power.

In this paper I will focus on Mayi-Mayi political history, on the symbolism which characterized this armed movement, its historicity and its role in mobilising youth in periods of crisis. Starting from an analysis of Kivu social history, I will consider the reasons that induce many youngsters to enrol. Then I will focus on Mayi-Mayi political discourse, their specific war rituals and practices

which shape a new form of identity that emerges from the state of war. Finally I will consider some consequences of the war in Congo where violence seems to recompense the ones that use it.

## **2. Mayi-Mayi: a “warrior tradition”**

Between October 1996 and May 1997, Mayi-Mayi appeared on the stage of the AFDL war, which put an end to Mobutu's regime. The movement is still active in the rural zones of North and South-Kivu. Actually the term Mayi-Mayi refers to a cluster of groups scarcely co-ordinated among themselves, ones that are often riven by internal conflicts. At the same time there are some common characteristics which enable us to construct a general view of the entire phenomenon. First of all Mayi-Mayi factions constantly resort to war rituals, centred on the belief in the power of *mayi* in protecting the combatants from the bullets. Second, the movement articulates a set of common grievances, based on nationalist ideals, in order to oppose Mayi-Mayi to Ugandan and Rwandan military intervention in Kivu. This mix of “secret power” and nationalism seems to be very attractive for young people in East Congo.

All around the world, when we speak about combatants we refer to young people. Most Mayi-Mayi fighters are very young, often children. But from a symbolic point of view, the Mayi-Mayi phenomenon is not “young”. During periods of crisis in Africa, the use of magic water has proved to be an effective tool to organize the new generations in militias and induce them to fight. Historically, meaningful links can be made between the present Mayi-Mayi rebellion and the resistance and rebel movements, which characterised East Africa in colonial and post-colonial times. From this point of view, Mayi-Mayi phenomenon speaks to a symbolic continuity with the beliefs and rites related to the invulnerability of warriors widely diffused in many African contexts.

The use of “magic water” to heal people and to fight enemies is well documented in the history of the continent. The anthropologist John Middleton, in an article published in 1958, analysed the Yakan cult among the Lugbara, a population living between Uganda and Congo<sup>1</sup>. The cult, which was centred upon the drinking of a magic water, appeared among the Lugbara at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but it was already practised by some neighbouring populations, such as the Dinka and the Mundu that used the magic water to fight against Arabs and the Azande empire. The cult spread among the Lugbara in a period of serious crisis: deadly diseases, such as meningitis, famine and the Mahadi revolt in Sudan contributed to create an atmosphere of deep uncertainty. At the beginning

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<sup>1</sup> J. Middleton, *The Yakan or Allah water cult among the Lugbara*, in «The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland», 93, 1, 1963, pp. 80-108.

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the Lugbara region was under Belgian influence, the men who had obtained the water from the neighbouring populations were able to increase their status and they were often named chiefs<sup>2</sup>. Later on, after 1913, the region became part of Uganda and the cult was promoted again by a prophet, named Rembe, who together with his assistants started to organise groups of young combatants, following a European military model, armed with dummy rifles. In 1919 the police intervened to prevent a big meeting of Yakan adepts and several people were killed. Since then Yakan has survived only as a healing cult.

Certainly, one of the better known cases of the use of magic water for rebel purposes is the case of Maji-Maji (water-water) rebellion which spread in Tanzania between 1905 and 1907<sup>3</sup>. At the beginning of the century the German colonial administration had tried to involve the country in the global market, an act that had exacerbated the domination. Vast areas had been transformed into plantations and the old social order had been completely warped. The Maji-Maji rebellion began between the Matumbi, a population settled in the regions west of Kilwa, where German colonisers had introduced cotton plantations and the local population had been compelled to a period of 28 days per year of forced labour.

The initial leader of the rebellion was Kinjikitile Ngwale, a man who lived in a village called Ngarambe. In 1904 Kinjikitile was possessed by Hongo, a spirit linked to the god Bokero, that was venerated in the southern regions of Tanzania. Under the influence of Hongo, Kinjikitile built a big hut where he communicated with ancestors. He began to sprinkle his young fighters with the *maji*, a water prepared with special herbs that was supposed to liquidize German bullets. Combatants had to respect many conditions in order to be protected by the *maji*, first of all sexual abstinence. Kinjikitile predicted the union of all Africans and announced that ancestors would return to support the rebellion. A lot of pilgrims started to visit his hut and take the *maji*, becoming invulnerable to bullets. A new cult was born that responded both to the lack of unity between different tribes and to the military gap due to the absence of guns: many youngsters joined the ranks of the rebellion led by the novel prophet of African liberation .

Unfortunately Kinjikitile was quickly arrested and hanged. Nevertheless, despite the sudden death of the prophet, many clans had already seized the *maji* that was prepared by an apposite figure called *hongo*, who was supposed to know its secret formula. But, the Germans reinforced their colonial army with recruits from Somalia and Guinea and they were able to contain the rebellion. Rebel villages were burnt as well as cultivated land. Hunger started to threaten the country and the

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<sup>2</sup> The Lugbara men who wanted the water had to pay for it. An interesting is that the water circulated through net created by secret societies such as the Nebeli (Middleton, (1963), cit., p.84).

<sup>3</sup> See inter alia, J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979.

belief in the power of *maji* waned rapidly as well as the unity between the different tribes. In 1907 the rebellion came to an end: according to German authority about 26.000 rebels had been killed and more than 50.000 civilians died because of hunger.

One of the most important aspects of the Maji-Maji rebellion was certainly its intertribal character, due to the diffusion of the *maji* cult among different ethnic groups. Besides, the rebels fought both against the external and internal enemy, respectively Germans and witches. In fact, after the rebellion many witchcraft eradication movements emerged in Tanzania inspired by Maji-Maji symbolism. As Terence Ranger has argued, «after the defeat of Maji-Maji, the cluster of symbols and claims to spiritual power which Kinjikitile had made use of was drawn upon by a succession of prophetic figures who were concerned with the internal purification of African societies, and who led what have been called “witchcraft eradication movements”»<sup>4</sup>. Probably these movements spread out mainly after the Second World War when European colonisers prohibited the killing of witches. Anyway the Maji-Maji symbolism had been tested and it had proved its effectiveness in mobilizing youth against invaders. Warriors, once sprinkled with water, fought bravely, scaring the enemy: the *maji* ritual was bound to resurge in future rebellions when it would be necessary to mobilize young people.

Another well documented case of the use of magic water in East Africa is the Simba rebellion (lions in Kiswahili) which broke out in Congo in 1964, four years after independence. On that occasion the ritual of the *maji* resurged again.

In December 1963 Pierre Mulele, who had been trained for a short time in China, came back to Kwilu, his birthplace, west of Kinshasa, and began a rebellion that aimed at a “second independence” of Congo. Some rudiments of guerrilla warfare and two revolvers were the initial means of the adventurous *maquis* of Lumumba’s heirs. At the same time a Nation Council for Liberation was created in Brazzaville by many nationalist leaders and Gbenye and Soumialot were charged with organizing the rebellion in the Eastern regions. The Mulelist rebellion started in January 1964 and initially benefited from popular consensus and support. The reaction of the national army was pitiless: villages were burnt, and cultivated land destroyed in the attempt to contain the war. But when the Mulele rebellion seemed to be nearly suppressed, Soumialot opened a new front in Kivu.

Simba were composed of young people mostly between 12 and 20 years old. According to Benoit Verhaegen, it was an age group that «the failed independence had particularly penalized, depriving them of school and work. They have nothing to lose in the insurrectional adventure and they

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<sup>4</sup> T. O. Ranger, *African initiatives and resistance in the face of partition and conquest*, in A. Adu. Boahen (ed.), *General History of Africa VII. Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, UNESCO, 1990, p. 55.

constituted the Simba forefront»<sup>5</sup>. The initial factors of Simba's success were essentially three: ethnic homogeneity between the leaders of the rebellion, terror and magic protection<sup>6</sup>. The most important rebel leaders were Bakusu, Baluba and Batetela, and this contributed to the initial cohesion of the movement. Furthermore, Simba made systematic use of terror: state agents, national officers, presumed traitors and simple thieves were tortured and executed in public. Finally, magic practices had a fundamental role: young Simba were first baptized with water and *dawa* (medicaments in Kiswahili) were given in order to protect them from bullets. Combatants had to respect numerous conditions: sexual abstinence, no stealing, a prohibition on washing themselves, during the fighting they could not retreat and they had to follow a lot of food restrictions. The analogies with magic practices of Tanzanian Maji-Maji are evident. Bob Kabamba and Olivier Lanotte argued that the ritual of *maji* was brought to Congo by Soumialot's Tanzanian advisors who induced him to adopt this practice also for the Kivu rebellion<sup>7</sup>. Even if the historical and political contexts were different, the war rituals were the same: their effectiveness in mobilizing young people had already been proven. But the *maji* was not enough for Simba faced with the reorganization of the national army. In November 1964 two military operations were launched, supported by mercenary troops. Belgian parachutists conquered Kisangani and that was the end of the rebellion.

### 3. The origins and the evolution of the present Mayi-Mayi movement

East Congo began to crumble at the beginning of the 1990s, long before the AFDL rebellion. The first militias active in Kivu were named Kasindien and Bangilima and they were mainly composed of Simba veterans<sup>8</sup>. The origins of these militias are uncertain. Vlassenroot argues that they had probably been created by Mobutu in order to support the *Uganda National Liberation Army* (UNLA), a rebel movement active in the Rwenzori massif and hostile to the Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni. In the same years in Masisi, a region north of Goma, traditional chiefs of the indigenous population, particularly Hunde, began to mobilize young people against Banyarwanda (people from Rwanda), the Rwandan speaking community, a mix of Hutu and Tutsi, living in East

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<sup>5</sup> B. Verhaegen, *1963-1965: d'oppositions en rébellions*, in GRIP, *Congo Zaïre. La colonisation -l'indépendance – le régime Mobutu – et demain?*, Bruxelles, 1990, p. 94.

<sup>6</sup> Ibidem, pp. 94-96.

<sup>7</sup> See B. Kabamba and O. Lanotte, *Guerres au Congo-Zaïre (1996-1999), Acteurs et scénarios*, in P. MATHIEU e J. – C. WILLAME, *Conflits et guerres au Kivu et dans la région des Grands Lacs*, «Cahiers Africains», 1999, n. 39-40, p. 128 (note 102).

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. K. Vlassenroot, *Violence et constitution de milices dans l'Est du Congo : le cas des Mayi-Mayi*, in «L'Afrique des Grands Lacs», Annuaire 2001-2002, p.124.

Congo<sup>9</sup>. The tensions between Banyarwanda and “autochthonous populations” increased and soon degenerated into a bloody conflict: at the core of the rivalry there was (and still is) strong competition over land and an ongoing conflict over nationality which confers the right to participate in political life.

In March 1993 many Banyarwanda civilians were massacred by “autochthonous militias” - mostly composed of Hunde, but also Nyanga and Tembo - at the market of Ntoto, a village in the Walikale region (North Kivu). The Banyarwanda reaction was inevitable and the conflict quickly got worse. For their part, indigenous chiefs addressed some Kasindien commanders that came to Masisi to train new militias. These commanders were considered *docteurs*, the men who were supposed to preserve the secret formula for *mayi* that would protect Hunde recruits from bullets<sup>10</sup>.

In 1993 the new militias started to call themselves Mayi-Mayi, perhaps a sign of an attempt at unification of all the military factions in the indigenous tribes. The year after, in April 1994, with the arrival in Kivu of more than a million Hutu refugees from Rwanda, the region was definitely destabilized. Despite Mayi-Mayi declaring themselves a nationalist movement, fighting for Congo’s integrity, they allied with Interahamwe, the militia responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. The new alliance started to pillage villages and to persecute the Tutsi population in Kivu.

In 1996 the campaign of the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo/Zaïre (AFDL) began. The goal of this armed movement, led by Laurent Désiré Kabila and supported by Rwanda and Uganda, was to put an end to Mobutu’s regime. Most of the Mayi-Mayi groups allied with Kabila; nevertheless some factions refused to join the campaign which was considered a Tutsi manoeuvre to conquer Kivu.

In April 1997 Mobutu’s army was defeated and Kabila took power; but the new government quickly lost consensus in Kivu. In Beni and Butembo (North Kivu), Mayi-Mayi groups started to attack AFDL soldiers, responsible for atrocities against the population, and in South Kivu general Padiri organized his own Mayi-Mayi group in the region of Bunyakiri<sup>11</sup>. The alliance between Kabila and Rwanda quickly deteriorated. Kabila accused Kigali of pillaging the country and expelled all Rwandans from Congo. Soon after, another rebellion started in Kivu: a new armed movement, the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD), appeared on the scene

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<sup>9</sup> The migration from Rwanda to Congo is an ancient phenomenon which was encouraged by the Belgians who needed labour for mines and plantations in East Congo that at the time was under populated. In short, in some areas, such as Masisi, the Banyarwanda became the majority of the population and after independence some members of this community, such as Cyprien Rwakabuba and Barthélémy Bisengimana, turned out to be important exponents of the Mobutu regime.

<sup>10</sup> See C. Mbindule Mitono, *Analyse de la rébellion May-May et son impact socio-politique et économique en territoire de Lubero au Nord-Kivu*, Travail de fine de cycle, Université Catholique du Graben, année académique 1999-2000, p. 13.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. H. Morvan, *Il movimento mayi-mayi a Bunyakiri*, in «Afriche e Orienti», n. 1-2, 2004, pp. 104-119.

supported again by Kigali which aimed to reassert its influence over Congo. With the second war, which started in August 1998, alliances changed again and Mayi-Mayi opposed the RCD rebellion which was considered a Tutsi attempt to regain Kivu. In this phase of the war Mayi-Mayi allied with the Kinshasa government which gave them military support. Since 1998 Mayi-Mayi have controlled Kivu's rural zones while the RCD has settled in urban centres.

After the peace agreement signed in Sun City and the creation of a provisional government, in April 2003, some Mayi-Mayi commanders joined the new national army, which was supposed to be composed of all rebel forces. Till now a few factions have still not been brought under control.

#### **4. Youth marginality and violence in East Congo**

It is important to focus on some aspects of Kivu's social history that are pertinent to this analysis. As many scholars have argued, in Africa there is strong correlation between the social and economic marginalization of young people and war. It is the case of East Congo where, as well as in other war-torn areas, young combatants emerge as new and leading actors. The progressive social and economic marginalization of younger generations is the result of complex historical dynamics, such as the erosion of the traditional system of land distribution and the collapse of the state and its institutions, first of all the school system. These dynamics have dramatically increased the propensity of young people to enrol: in East Congo the recourse to violence has become one of the rare opportunities for social mobility as it is one of the rare alternatives to social marginalization.

In Kivu a large percentage of young people has proved to be disposed to enrol. According to Frank Van Acker and Koen Vlassenroot this phenomenon is to some extent connected to a process of social fragmentation tied to land distribution<sup>12</sup>. In pre-colonial times the Bami, the traditional chiefs, were responsible for the distribution of land which was considered collective property. In exchange for land, the families had to pay a yearly tribute in kind, a chicken or a goat depending on the amount of land they received. During colonisation, the Belgians set up a system of land registration, thereby introducing private ownership. The colonial administration did not suppress the traditional system but most of the vacant lands, which traditionally constituted a reserve for the communities, were declared state property and then transformed into plantations.

The turning point was the promulgation in 1973 of the Bakajika law during Mobutu's regime: according to this law all the Congolese soil and subsoil became state property and the traditional

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<sup>12</sup> F. Van Acker and K. Vlassenroot, *Youth and conflict in Kivu: 'Komona clair'*, in «The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance», 2000, <http://www.jha.ac/greatlakes/b004.htm>, p. 3 and following pages.

system was definitively suppressed. However, the new law was never fully enforced and the uncertainty over land rights brought chaos. According to Van Acker and Vlassenroot, the Bakajika law «allowed the economic control over land to shift from colonial family-held plantations to a new class of urban Congolese entrepreneurs and for it to be concentrated in their hands, save for a limited number of surviving company plantations»<sup>13</sup>. The Mobutu regime was founded on “clientelism”: the state had been transformed into a predatory machine and the dictator redistributed part of his wealth to a restricted group of politicians and businessmen in exchange for their loyalty. Mobutu’s clients seized big plots that in many cases remained uncultivated. In Masisi, where the soil is fertile and the demographic pressure is very high, many people were deprived of their land and some politicians belonging to the Banyarwanda community – such as Bisengimana Rwena, who at that time was the chief of staff of Mobutu – took possession of vast plots which were mainly transformed into cattle farms. The consequence of this process of land spoliation was a dramatic augmentation of social inequality.

These changes, due to the new laws, produced inter-generational effects. In fact, the new generations were the most penalized and soon a new *lumpen* class, made up of young men with no land, emerged on the social scene. The labour surplus could not be absorbed by the Congolese economy, which lacked industry, and the ongoing augmentation of demographic pressure contributed to aggravate the situation. Young people started to move from their villages, looking for jobs in the Congolese informal economy as diamond dealers, gold-diggers, pedlars in urban centres etc. These new occupations were precarious; besides most of them remained unemployed. At the same time the school system completely collapsed and only private schools survived but the cost was too high for most of the families. The result was that at the beginning of the 90s many young men were experiencing a condition of marginality and frustration, living in critical economic conditions. The public administration had completely lost its credibility and Mobutu’s soldiers, who were no longer being paid, started to pillage civilians. In this context, the explosion of violence in Kivu represented for many youngsters an opportunity: the enrolment in rural militias had become one of the rare ways to escape marginality and a chance for social mobility, as well as an occasion to take revenge against the Mobutu apparatus of violence.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibidem, p. 3.



## 5. The choice to enrol

As we have seen, in East Congo the new generations have to face serious constraints which drastically restrict their agency. Even if most of the combatants have joined an armed group voluntarily, we must underline that the choice to enrol is taken in a context of very limited opportunities. In addition, once the conflict has started, the escalation of violence often forces young people to enrol *en masse* given that in a situation of widespread insecurity, enrolment is sometimes the only alternative to death.

The political and propagandistic pressure towards enrolment is high: the military and political leaders often present their communities as victims of a broad conspiracy and on the point of being exterminated. A Mayi-Mayi commander, for example, showed me a document which, according to him, constituted the proof of the existence of a secret Tutsi plan which aimed to conquer Congo and to exterminate all Congolese people. The text was signed by the presidents of Uganda and Rwanda, Yoweri Museveni and Paul Kagame, and was made up of different points in which the two leaders declared their intentions: to pillage Congo's resources, to sterilize the women, to kill all the young men etc. Despite the fact that this document was clearly a fake, and even full of typographical errors, it summarized a widespread interpretation of the Congolese conflict which is considered a Tutsi attempt, supported by western countries, to dominate Central Africa. According to this kind of propaganda, and I will come to this point again, the mobilization of all forces within the community - young men but also women and children - is presented as the only means of survival.

Nevertheless, even though political pressure and propaganda are undoubtedly two important factors, the pursuit of material benefits certainly constitutes another big incentive for enrolment in Congo (actually it is very difficult to establish an order among these different factors). According to a survey carried out by UNICEF Bukavu<sup>14</sup> 25% of Kadogo<sup>15</sup> (child-soldiers in Kiswahili) declared they had joined the AFDL of Kabila with the aim of obtaining some material benefits, 28% of them declared that it was a matter of absence of job opportunities, and 15% wanted to take their revenge on the 'Forces Armées Zairoises', Mobutu's army. Only 7% referred to patriotic motivations such as to put an end to Mobutu's dictatorship and free the country.

The fact that the search for material benefits often constitutes a major factor for enrolment explains why many combatants easily pass from an armed group to another. Actually opportunism

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<sup>14</sup> Cited in F. Van Acker and K. Vlassenroot, *Les 'Mai- Mai' et les fonctions de la violence milicienne dans l'est du Congo*, in «Politique africaine», Vol. 84, 2001, p. 107.

<sup>15</sup> In Kiswahili this term means 'little' and it is normally used when referring to child-soldiers. Most of the child-soldiers who joined Kabila were previously fighting with Mayi-Mayi.

seems to be at the basis of many choices and behaviours. It is a widespread opportunism that, according to Bogumil Jewsiewicki, is connected to what he defines as “mobutist habitus”. This *habitus* has been moulded by many years of the rapacious Mobutu dictatorship, that has pushed people to behave on the basis of personal profit and on a symbolic violent definition of the other, as well as on a fear of becoming oneself a victim of this violence<sup>16</sup>.

To broaden my analysis I will consider now some passages from interviews made with some Mayi-Mayi combatants and ex-combatants. The first one is Kakule, an ex-combatant I met in 2003 when he was twenty-five years old; he had joined Mayi-Mayi in 1996 and he got out in 2000. At the time of our encounter he was living in Lukanga, a village 30 km south of Butembo. Kakule was not married, he had no job and he passed most of his time drinking in the little pubs of the village where women prepare and serve local beer:

I joined Mayi-Mayi when I was eighteen years old. I had nothing to do in Lukanga and I had a debt of twenty-five dollars. I was in debt to Papi, a little dealer in the village, who had lent me some money to buy myself some clothes. Papi was harassing me, so I went to a friend in Vitshumbi [a village on lake Edouard] to escape my debt. I was not working in Vitshumbi. In that period the soldiers of Mobutu [FAZ] were fleeing Goma; Mayi-Mayi were ousting them. When Mayi-Mayi arrived in Kanyabayonga, the FAZ ran away towards Vitshumbi. I could not come back to Lukanga and in the village there was war. After a week Mayi-Mayi came to face with the FAZ; people in the village were fleeing but I didn't know where to go so I stayed there. I saw Mayi-Mayi beating FAZ who retreated to Niakakoma. I stayed with them [Mayi-Mayi], and I asked to join the movement. (...). I left the movement because I didn't have any more goals; Kabila, our chief, was far away. When I came back to Lukanga I had some bodyguards and everybody was afraid of me. Nobody asked me for money anymore.

According to his explanation, Kakule enrolled by chance. He was fleeing a debt and he did not know where to go. From his point of view, becoming a Mayi-Mayi meant turning into a strong man, escorted by bodyguards. His status was completely reversed: from passive subject, persecuted by his creditor, he became a scared man. In his explanation, the choice to enrol seemed to have only an individualistic dimension: ideology, political aspirations were “far away” as well as his chief Kabila.

Another young Mayi-Mayi, called Kasereka, told me:

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<sup>16</sup> See B. Jewsiewicki, *Les traumatismes des affirmations identitaires, ou la malédiction de ne être rien*, in «Cahiers d'Études africaines», 1998, 150-152, XXXVIII-2-4, p. 632.

I'm from Kanyabayonga but I went to Goma to study at the Institut Supérieur. I joined Mayi-Mayi in 1993. I gave up school because I couldn't pay the fees any more. After that I decided to join Mayi-Mayi to liberate the country, but if I had the means I would have continued studying. Mayi-Mayi were fighting against FAZ. I joined a group called Kifua-Fua, they were fighting naked because to release the country you have to fight naked, it is written in the Bible. We were fighting against Mobutu, but the FAZ beat us. The Kifua-Fua were in the regions of Ruchuru, Lubero, Masisi and also Walikale. After the defeat we retreated into the forest and I went back to Goma, but again I was without money. After that I joined this group [of La Fontaine]. (...). I don't know the causes of this war; I'm not a politician. In Congo there are 450 languages and every dialect wants its own president. Peace is difficult.

Kasereka was twenty-six years old when I met him. At the time he was in the Mayi-Mayi commanded by La Fontaine<sup>1</sup>, based in the villages of Muhanga and Bunyatenge, about 70 km west of Lubero. He was disillusioned, he had been fighting for a long time and he no longer wanted to talk about the causes of the war, which in his eyes had become something inexplicable. Actually, not only the war but even his life had become senseless and he could not find any reasons for the violence around him.

Sometimes the choice to enrol is justified simply by the will to pillage and take profit from the situation of disorder. The passage from one armed faction to another is often motivated by the search for money, better food or even a nicer uniform. For example Kavira, a sixteen-year-old girl who had been fighting for three years, told me that she had preferred to enrol in the APC (the Armée Populaire Congolaise, another armed faction in North Kivu) simply because they had better uniforms than Mayi-Mayi. Besides she did not know where the latter had their military camp. When I met her, in March 2003 she had just fought in Mambasa (Ituri region) and she told me her experience:

I joined the APC because I wanted to eat without working; I wanted to go around in a car smoking chanvre [marijuana]. (...). I chose APC because I didn't know where Mayi-Mayi had their camp. I preferred APC because they had uniforms and were better armed. (...). I like war because I can take advantage of the situation and steal things. In Mambasa we took gold in MLC camp. (...). When I go into the houses of people who have run away I change my clothes, take oil and all the products. You have to be quick! If I go into the house and I am not strong enough to carry the television, then I destroy everything and I leave nothing to the enemy. In Mambasa we pillaged a lot. When the enemy flees, we enter the houses and we pillage. In Mambasa I took a mattress, a radio with eight batteries

and some money. On the road I sold everything. In APC they give us nothing, so we try to survive by arresting people. They give us enough to eat, but if we want to get money we have to rob people.

Even if Kavira was only thirteen years old when she enrolled, the reasons she produced to explain her choice were not significantly different from her older comrades (she was just a bit more explicit and perhaps naïve). Definitively, most of the combatants find it difficult to make sense of their experience, especially if they have spent many years fighting without the war producing any result. At the end personal profit becomes the only reason to be a soldier. On the other hand, the leaders of all armed movements in Congo have used violence mainly in order to promote their personal interests and social ascent: on a smaller scale, combatants do nothing more than reproduce this attitude.

A variable that we have to consider carefully while speaking of African conflicts is the long duration of wars. In many regions, such as East Congo, war has lost its character of exceptionality pervading everyday life: for combatants it becomes nearly impossible to formulate an ideological or political explanation of their status which could provide them with a justification for their actions. In this situation violence seems to become self-validating: killings and destruction motivated by the simple desire for personal revenge, pillages of villages carried out to satisfy the greed for some goods, rapes motivated by a momentary desire to possess a woman. This partially explains why pillage is so diffused and systematically practised: in a war where violence is used in many cases to satisfy the personal ambitions of a leader and his entourage, pillage becomes an indispensable instrument to control and motivate combatants. Actually, for many soldiers it is the only reason to fight for.

## **6. Mayi-Mayi rituals and symbolism**

We can consider Mayi-Mayi as an imagined community with seemingly common symbolic signposts<sup>17</sup>. The symbolic dimension and ritual practices, as well as the political discourse I will consider later, mark out this community and define a specific “Mayi-Mayi identity”. To focus on this point does not mean to portray Mayi-Mayi as an exotic phenomenon, a risk denounced by many anthropologists today<sup>18</sup>; on the contrary it means to recognise the importance of these aspects since,

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<sup>17</sup> Cfr. I. Abdullah, ‘*I am a rebel*’. *Youth culture & violence in Sierra Leone*, in A. Honwana & F. De Boeck (eds), *Makers and Breakers. Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, James Currey, Oxford, 2005, p. 173.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. J. MacClancy (ed.), *Exotic no more. Anthropology on the front lines*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2002.

as Arsène Mwaka Bwenge has observed, «ces modes de pensée mobilisent des masses et structurent des comportements qui font l’histoire aujourd’hui»<sup>19</sup>. We could add that these masses are essentially made up of young people.

As we already know, the central belief is in the *mayi*, the magic water, a widespread and historically rooted belief. The *mayi* is prepared by *docteurs* (in South-Kivu they are named *nganga*). In most of the cases *docteurs* are children normally initiated by an older one. Water is put in plastic tanks that are kept in a *baraza*, a hut in the middle of the military camp accessible only by *docteurs*. The water is treated in the *baraza* with special herbs mixed with organic substances. A very young *docteur* told me that to prepare the *mayi* he used parts of the human body such as the testicles which are reduced in ash and mixed with the water. *Docteurs* also prepare medicaments called *dawa*, made from pulverized herbs, which are supposed to strengthen the power of *mayi*.

According to the fighters I met, Mayi-Mayi warriors are first scarified on the forehead, chest, arms and ankles. The *docteur* puts some *dawa* in the wounds and then he sprinkles them with water. After this ritual the recruit becomes a Mayi-Mayi and a weapon is given to him (at the beginning of the 1990’s Mayi-Mayi mainly used knives or machetes because of a lack of weapons).

When Mayi-Mayi go to war they are always followed by a *docteur* with a tank of water. He continuously sprinkles the warriors saying “*mayi-mayi*”. Combatants also have to scream “*mayi-mayi*” when they fight in order to invoke the power of the water.

Warriors have to respect several rules. During my field research I was able to collect many prescriptions which I will summarize in the following points: a prohibition on having sexual intercourse, prohibition on stealing, prohibition on looking at blood, prohibition on washing and using soap, prohibition on eating *sombe* (manioc leaves), prohibition on eating foods cooked with peel, prohibition on eating bones. Civilians cannot touch Mayi-Mayi and if they encounter one of them in the street they have to pass on his left. Finally, all objects touched by Mayi-Mayi that have previously been in contact with civilians must be strewn with some soil.

When a Mayi-Mayi dies, his death is attributed to the infraction of one of these rules and this partially explains their complexity (actually it is almost impossible to respect all the rules strictly). Many youngsters, especially children, are deceived and manipulated through these practices. Besides, most of the rules are not respected and a dramatic example is sexual abstention: in fact rapes and kidnapping of women are systematically perpetrated by Mayi-Mayi.

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<sup>19</sup> Cfr. A. Mwaka Bwenge, *Les milices Mayi-mayi à l’Est de la République du Congo, Dynamique d’une de gouvernmentalité en situation de crise*, in «Revue Africaine de Sociologie», 7, 2, 2003.

## 7. Mayi-Mayi: an identity between tradition and modernity

According to Ivan Vangu Ngimbi, the youth crisis in Africa can be considered as a «crise du placement sociale», that is «une crise des mécanismes d'intégration qui assureraient l'insertion des individus dans la société»<sup>20</sup>. The last resource for many young people to find a space within the society is violence, that is why they are often considered as a threat and a danger. To become a Mayi-Mayi – or a Cobra, a Ninja, a Cosa Nostra and so on – is a way to escape anonymity and to take revenge against a society that relegates the new generations to the margins. Hence in contemporary Africa violence furnishes and shapes new models of socialization and social assertion. As Mamadou Diouf has argued, «to kill, to experience violence and pleasure, to move along the obscure path of the night and migration, of witchcraft, of the urban and rural undergrounds – all these impulses produce new cultures, new sociabilities, and new meanings of pleasure, life and death»<sup>21</sup>. In short, new cultures and new forms of identity emerge from the state of war. On this issue, Achille Mbembe has affirmed that «the state of war in contemporary Africa should [in fact] be conceived as a general cultural experience that shapes identities, just as do the family, the school and other social institutions»<sup>22</sup>.

Starting from the considerations above, we can affirm that the Mayi-Mayi fighter is a form of identity shaped by the state of war. As I argued before, the symbolism and ritual practices which characterized this identity are part of a symbolic corpus which is reactivated in time of crisis<sup>23</sup>. In East Congo young people have experienced a double crisis: the traditional culture and the traditional forms of social organization have lost their pertinence and they are no longer able to give sense to and to organize reality. Besides, this “empty space” has not been filled since the project of modernization of the country and the promises of the “theology” of development have completely failed, producing only disillusion and frustration. The result is a deep uncertainty in which the recourse to violence is a means of breaking with the current situation and at the same time it offers alternative models of identification and socialization.

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<sup>20</sup> I. Vangu Ngimbi, *Jeunesse, funérailles et contestation socio-politique en Afrique*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 1997, p. 44.

<sup>21</sup> Diouf, M., *Engaging Postcolonial Cultures: African Youth and Public Space*, in «African Studies Review», 2003, n. 2, v. 46, pp. 9-10.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. A. Mbembe, *African Modes of Self-Writing*, in «Public Culture», 2002, 14 (1), p. 267.

<sup>23</sup> Achille Mbembe has argued that the state of war represents a zone of indistinction, where the boundaries between chaos and order disappear. Furthermore, he affirms that «Through sacrifice, the African subject transforms his or her own subjectivity and produces something new—something that does not belong to the domain of a lost identity that must at all costs be found again, but rather something radically different, something open to change and whose theory and vocabulary remain to be invented» (Ivi). I partially agree with Mbembe, since, as it is the case for Mayi-Mayi, this war-identities are not completely new but a re-proposal and re-interpretation of “tested” models.

The temporality of the subject can only be the immediate-present, due to the rupture with the past and to the absence or impossibility of any projectuality. About this issue Jewsiewicki has argued that «the frame of the subject who lives in Africa is the *présent-maintenant*: cut out his or her past, the subject is removed from his or her own place (...). In Africa, where societies have been marked by the slave trade and by colonization, indiscipline offers the subject its sole tactical recourse – a negative one, to boot. Indiscipline makes it possible to resist, to remove oneself from the actions of the Other»<sup>24</sup>.

In addition, the reduction to a *présent-maintenant* seems to open the doors to the realm of fantasy and witchcraft - the second world - where everything is possible. The dialogues I had with Mayi-Mayi fighters were constantly marked by fantasy:

(...)Yes the dawa. Dawa was also a magic word. When you pronounced it you could disappear.

- *You know I do not believe in these things...*

It is like that! Among us the ones who did not have sexual intercourses with women had become so powerful that they could fly!

- *And how did they do?*

It needed to have five plastic bags, the ones with blue and white strips, not the black ones. To fly it needed to attach two at the arms, two at the calves, and you sit on one. But you did not have to buy the little bags from women sellers. In the group, two were able to fly, they were young and they had not e touched a woman yet. To communicate they used the leaves as Motorola but only the docteur had this power<sup>25</sup>.

The Mayi-Mayi fighter emerges as a form of identity which imposes itself as an alternative to the chaos and incertitude generated by the crisis and the war; but this alternative seems to be moulded largely by fantasy. If we look closer at this process of identity construction/invention, we can notice its deep ambiguity: on the one hand Mayi-Mayi practices and symbolism refer to an “African warrior tradition”; on the other hand the figure of the fighter is charged with modernity. In fact the young combatant, by means of pillage, is able to accede to those goods which can be considered as the fetishes of modernity: I refer to sun glasses, mobile phones, smart shoes and clothes, four wheel cars, motorcycles etc. These objects are part of an «economy of desired goods that are known, that may sometimes be seen, that one wants to enjoy, but to which one will never have material access». In an economy of scarcity the symbolic value of these objects increases and the only way to have

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<sup>24</sup>B. Jewsiewicki, *The Subject in Africa : In Foucault's Footsteps*, in «Public Culture», 14, 3, 2002, pp. 593-598.

<sup>25</sup> Interview made in Lukanga (2003) to Kakule, 25 years.

access to them is through occult practices or violence: combatants are among the “few elects” and through the ostentation of these goods they are able to renegotiate and increase their status.

Global trends are continually domesticated into local forms<sup>26</sup>. According to Diouf, «the condition of young people in Africa, as well as their future, is heavily influenced by the interaction between global and local pressures: the fragmentation or dissolution of local culture and memory, on the one hand, and the influences of global culture, on the other»<sup>27</sup>. In the case of Mayi-Mayi, as well as most militias<sup>28</sup>, a global war mediatized culture is reinterpreted at the local level. In the little cinemas in Butembo, according to a survey I did in 2003, the five most seen movies were, in order: Delta Force II, with Chuck Norris; My Father is a Hero, interpreted by Jet Lee; Rambo I and II of Sylvester Stallone, and Commando with Arnold Schwarzenegger. The cinemas were assiduously attended by combatants, both APC and Mayi-Mayi<sup>29</sup>, who easily identify themselves with the actors and the plots of these movies<sup>30</sup> and they embody the gestures and the poses seen on the screen by reproducing them in real life with the fetish par excellence : the Kalashnikov.

Nevertheless, Mayi-Mayi is an ambiguous movement: on the one hand it creates new localities through the domestication of global trends; on the other hand the movement proposes a strong rupture with the present, closing down from the rest of the world through a recourse to a tradition continuously being reinvented and adapted. It is a continual oscillation between openness and closure. Kakule La Fontaine, a Mayi-Mayi commander who was one of my interlocutors during my field research, told me:

The Mayi-Mayi do not have international supports, they use African tradition. Congo is an ignorant country, annihilated by the white man. Witchcraft (sorcellerie) is a science: the leaves give power. Our ancestors were strong but the white man annihilated us with the church. The white men have science, in Africa there is witchcraft. Witchcraft is occult and it is persecuted by western science, but witchcraft is the same thing as science, but witches do not reveal their secrets. Some doctors learn by practice, other during the dream.

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<sup>26</sup>A. Honwana & F. De Boeck (eds), *Makers and Breakers. Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, James Currey, Oxford, 2005, p.1.

<sup>27</sup> M. Diouf, (2003), cit., p. 2.

<sup>28</sup>R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, *Les Ninja, les Cobra et les Zoulou crèvent l'écran à Brazzaville: le rôle des média et la construction des identités de violence politique*, in «*Canadian Journal of African Studies*», 33, 2-3, 1999, pp. 329-361.

<sup>29</sup> At that time Butembo was occupied by the Mayi-Mayi commended by Modhou and APC soldiers. The two movements had made an alliance that broke out some months later.

<sup>30</sup> It is important to consider the plots of these movies. For example Paul Richards has analysed the significance of the plot of *Rambo I* in the experience of young combatants in Sierra Leone. See P. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, James Currey, Oxford, 1996, p. 57 and following pages.



The eternal dilemma between tradition and modernity emerges in Mayi-Mayi: despite Mayi-Mayi having a web site<sup>31</sup>, in their discourse there emerges a refusal of modernity which passes through the exaltation and the re-invention of African tradition. Thus, witchcraft is sometime interpreted as a practice of pre-colonial Africa, as an ancient and pure source of power. This process is quite contradictory since Mayi-Mayi, as well as many religious and armed movements in the history of Africa, participate with zeal in the struggle against witchcraft. For example, in Beni and Lubero territories (North Kivu), the Mayi-Mayi killed many people, accusing them of being a *muloyi* (witches in Kinande, the local language). From these practices emerges an ideology of social purification and revival – typical of many prophetic movements - that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century had already inspired, as we have seen, the witchcraft eradication movements which followed the defeat of the Maji-Maji rebellion in Tanzania.

Once more the fluidity and the ambiguity of witchcraft discourse is confirmed: on the one hand witchcraft is considered positive when it is interpreted as an ancestral practice, as a source of occult power which survived the colonial domination and post-colonial chaos and now can be used as a weapon to fight the white man who are ultimately responsible for the Congolese war. On the other hand, witchcraft can be used for bad and egoistic purposes: it is the ultimate cause of social crisis and to release the Congolese people, dominated by evil, and create a new order, it is indispensable to eradicate it.

The construction of a Mayi-Mayi identity presents relevant analogies with the identitarian strategies of some religious communities which are omnipresent in Congo. For example Filip de Boeck has analysed the community of Bundu dia Congo that is a healing community based on the idea of rupture with the colonial past and the post-colonial present<sup>32</sup>. To this rupture, the community opposes the cult of the authenticity of the ancestors, practised by its members who live isolated from the rest of the society. Following De Boeck, who has studied the Kikwit (Bandundu) section of the church, «the community of Bundu dia Congo is closely knit. Most members live together in a large village-like compound, referred to as a *Mbanza Congo*, the city of ‘kongo’, in which daily life is organised around the figure of a living prophet, present in their midst»<sup>33</sup>. The description is similar to a Mayi-Mayi military camp, most of which are isolated in faraway rural and forest areas. In the case of Mayi-Mayi the isolation is even corporal: as we have seen, the combatant cannot be

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<sup>31</sup>Cfr. [www.congo-mai-mai.net](http://www.congo-mai-mai.net). It is the site of the group commanded Padiri, one of the most important Mayi-Mayi leader who now has been integrated as general in the new national army.

<sup>32</sup> F. De Boeck, *Beyond the grave : History, Memory and Death in Postcolonial Congo/Zaire*, in R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony. African Anthropology and the critique of power*, Zed Books, London & New York, 1998, pp. 21-57.

<sup>33</sup> Ibidem, p. 33.

touched by a civilian and the objects cannot be exchanged directly between a civilian and a fighter<sup>34</sup>.

An interesting point is that the community of Bundu da Congo has transformed Lumumba into an ideal ancestor, actually a model of ancestor. This process of “ancestralization” of Lumumba is observable among Mayi-Mayi too. A widespread belief is that the *dawa* are made with the powder of the bones of Lumumba, whose spirit lives in the bottom of a lake where the *docteur* goes to collect the ingredients to prepare the magical protections. Even in this case, Lumumba seems to have been transformed into an ancestor – the chief of the ancestors – and his body has become a source of power as well as the evocation of his name: “*mayi a Lumumba*” (the water of Lumumba) is one of the Mayi-Mayi war cry. Congolese society, disoriented when confronted with an epochal crisis which is also a crisis of the memory, is trying to reinvent its roots: Lumumba has been transformed into both ancestor and redeemer<sup>35</sup>, an indispensable source of power to rebuild a moral community.

## 8. The political discourse

The Mayi-Mayi political discourse can be defined as nationalistic mixed with a strong anti-Tutsi feeling. The analysis of this discourse sheds light on the “techniques of self-representation” which lead to a shared interpretation of the conflict in East Congo. This issue is deeply related to youngsters’ involvement in the war since, as Rachele Brett and Irma Specht argued, «in societies where the military (whether government or armed group) provides status and role model as well as the means of livelihood, and for whom identity (religious, ethnic and peer group) is bound up in the understanding of the conflict, there need to be strong counter-factors if young people are not to become involved»<sup>36</sup>.

In 2000, the commander Mudhou, who was one of the Mayi-Mayi leaders in Beni territory, during a speech to his combatants, proclaimed « we are here to rescue Congolese from the hegemony of a few people, from dictatorship and western imperialism with the goal of establishing a democratic

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<sup>34</sup> I refer here to the beginning of the Mayi-Mayi movement when most of the fighters respected the rules. In the last years, as many people say, Mayi-Mayi have become “brigands as all the other. They do not respect the rules anymore”. In fact, most of Mayi-Mayi militias have progressively took part to the war economy giving protection to some big mineral dealers.

<sup>35</sup> In popular painting Lumumba is often represented as a Christ. Cfr. B. Jewsiewicki, *Corps interdits. La représentation christique de Lumumba comme rédempteur du peuple Zaïrois*, in «Cahiers d’études africains», 141/2, 34, 1996, pp. 113-142.

<sup>36</sup> R. Brett and I. Specht, *Young soldiers. Why they choose to fight*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2004, p. 36.

government with no classes»<sup>37</sup>. This statement is quite representative of Mayi-Mayi political discourse. Generally, Mayi-Mayi present themselves as a popular auto-defence force fighting against Ugandan and Rwandan armies which, according to local interpretation, were able to invade and pillage Congo thanks to western support. Many commentators have underlined the vagueness of these arguments. For example, Bob Kabamba and Olivier Lanotte argued «en réalité, tous ces groupes *mayi mayi* n'ont pas de réel projet politique; leur seule revendication politique est le départ des Tutsi. Autrement dit: «*le Congo aux Congolais*». Cette revendication suffit pour susciter l'engouement populaire de tout le Kivu. Les *mayi mayi* symbolisent ainsi l'idéal anti-tutsi dans l'est du Congo»<sup>38</sup>. This statement is perhaps too severe: despite Mayi-Mayi having always been defined as “negative forces”, even by the UN, the weakness of the political project is not a peculiar feature of this movement; on the contrary it is a characteristic shared by all the factions fighting in East Congo where the political discourse seems to be just a matter of propaganda.

Mayi-Mayi political discourse, although confused, is not irrelevant. It is influenced by Marxism and nationalistic ideology rooted in the 60s and the figure of Patrice Lumumba who, as I will show, has been opportunistically emphasised. Some Mayi-Mayi factions have sometimes divulged their political ideas through manifestos and leaflets. During my research I collected some of these manifestos which can be useful to our analysis. For example, the document, reported below, was written and distributed in May 2001 by a Mayi-Mayi faction, called *Resistance Nationale Lumumbiste*. This group was active in the territory of Beni and was commanded by a chief called Lolwako. In the leaflet the Mayi-Mayi explained the reasons that had pushed them to kidnap 26 workers of the Daraforet, a Thai company which was exploiting the forest near Beni. The Mayi-Mayi, following the UN report on the illegal exploitation of Congolese natural resources<sup>39</sup>, accused the Daraforet of pillaging the country. The capture of the workers aimed to focus the attention of the international community on the war in Congo and particularly on the fact that some multinationals were making important profits thanks to the protection accorded by Congolese rebel groups and foreign armies. The document makes public the political goals of this Mayi-Mayi faction. Later on, the workers were released after a negotiation run by Patrice Lumumba's son, François Lumumba, who had been asked to mediate by the Mayi-Mayi commander Lolwako.

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<sup>37</sup> This speech was pronounced on 25/12/2000 in the military camps of Luotu/Lubwe. Cit. in C. Mbindule Mitono, (1999-2000), cit., p. 24.

<sup>38</sup> B. Kabamba e O. Lanotte (1999), p. 129.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. United Nations, *Report of the Panel of Experts on Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo*, United Nations Security Council, New York, 12 April 2001.

REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO  
RESISTANCE NATIONALE LUMUMBISTE  
R. N. L.  
QUARTIER GENERAL VURONDO/VIHYA  
SECRETARIAT GENERAL

DE L'ARRESTATION DES 24 THAILANDAIS, D'UN SUJET SUEDOIS  
ET D'UN SUJET KENYAN A LA SOCIETE DARA FORET A MANGINA  
LE 16 MAI 2001

*A. De la Résistance Nationale de Lumumba*

La Résistance Nationale Lumumbiste est un Mouvement des Lumumbistes qui résiste contre l'agression Rwando-Ougandaise dont la République du Congo est victime. Elle a été créée à VURONDO/VIHYA, le 12 Mars 2001. Elle est la branche armée du Mouvement National Congolais/Lumumba car ce dernier ne prône pas la violence pour accéder au pouvoir.

*B. Les objectifs de la résistance Nationale Lumumbiste*

La Résistance Lumumbiste a pour objectif principal :

\* La conquête du pouvoir par tous les moyens y compris la force pour traduire par les faits les objectifs principaux du Mouvement National Congolais/LUMUMBA qui sont :

- Lutter pour l'indépendance totale du Congo et de l'Unité du pays ;
- Instaurer au Congo une société démocratique au sein de laquelle les droits de l'homme, les libertés d'expression, d'opinion, d'association, de croyance religieuse puissent être rigoureusement protégées ;
- Susciter l'entente, la collaboration et l'unité de tous les Congolais qui aiment leur pays sans distinction de sexe, d'origine, de croyance ou de fortune ;
- Combattre le colonialisme, le néo-colonialisme, l'impérialisme, l'exploitation de l'homme par l'homme, la discrimination raciale, le régionalisme, le tribalisme et le népotisme ;
- Promouvoir le progrès social, économique, politique et culturel du peuple congolais ;
- Concrétiser la vocation africaine du lumumbisme qui entend faire du Congo le Centre de rayonnement de l'Afrique toute entière par la philosophie du panafricanisme.

*C. Pourquoi la Résistance Nationale Lumumbiste ?*

Après la mort de Patrice Emery LUMUMBA et la dispersion de tous les nationalistes congolais, les puissances étrangères ont placé Monsieur MOBUTU à la tête du Congo pour assujettir le peuple congolais. Pendant ce régime toutes les écoles, tous les hôpitaux, les routes, les voies ferrées ont été détruits, l'habitat n'avaient jamais été la

préoccupation de son régime, les fonctionnaires n'avaient pas de salaire, la misère était à son comble.

A la venue de Laurent Désiré KABILA, rien n'a changé, mais il s'est ajouté à tous les maux précités, la guerre qui a engagé plusieurs troupes étrangères sur le territoire congolais dont les troupes ougandaises qui ont violés et qui continuent à violer les femmes congolaises. Or nous savons que l'Ouganda figure parmi les pays les plus touchés par la pandémie du SIDA, en conséquence les ravages du SIDA au Congo sont incalculables.

Actuellement l'Ouganda, le Rwanda et le Burundi occupent plus de la moitié de la superficie du Congo où ils pillent les richesses naturelles du Congo selon le rapport de l'O.N.U., tuent les Congolais et incendient des villages entiers. Monsieur Jean-Pierre BEMBA et Adolphe ONUSUMBA ne sont que des marionnettes au service du Rwanda, du Burundi et de l'Ouganda pour faciliter le pillage systématique du Congo et leurrer la communauté internationale pour qu'elle ne parle pas d'occupation du Congo par ces trois pays.

Donc le Front pour la Libération du Congo (F.L.C.) de Jean-Pierre BEMBA et le Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (R.C.D.) d'Adolphe ONUSUMBA ne sont pas des Mouvements de Rébellion, plutôt des associations des malfaiteurs assoiffés du pouvoir et avides d'argent sans jamais songer à la misère du peuple congolais. Depuis que ces soi-disant rébellions se sont déclenchées à l'Est du Congo, la situation socio-économique du peuple congolais ne cesse de se dégrader. A titre d'exemple, dans la partie occupée par le F.L.C. de Jean-Pierre BEMBA toutes les institutions sanitaires, scolaires, académiques, les infrastructures routières sont délabrées, les fonctionnaires de l'Etat n'ont pas de salaire depuis belle lurette, les militaires congolais au service du F.L.C. ne sont pas payés ; seuls les militaires ougandais sont payés tandis que quelques recettes sont générées par les activités commerciales et industrielles de cette partie du pays. D'après les déclarations de Jean-Pierre BEMBA lui-même, les territoires de Beni et Lubero rapportent à son mouvement plus d'un million des dollars américains par mois ; alors on se pose la question de savoir comment est géré cet argent au moment où tous les indicateurs de la vie nationale virent au rouge.

Une autre caractéristique de ce mouvement est que les services générateurs des recettes sont sous le contrôle strict des amis personnels de Jean-Pierre BEMBA.

Voilà les quelques raisons qui ont poussé les nationalistes congolais à créer une branche armée du Mouvement National Congolais/Lumumba pour mettre fin à cette situation misérable qui prévaut au Congo.

### *C. Les raisons qui ont poussé la Résistance Nationale Lumumbiste à arrêter les employés étrangers de la Société DARAFORÉ à MANGINA*

Ces raisons sont :

1. D'après le rapport du Groupe d'Experts sur l'Exploitation Illégale des Ressources Naturelles et autres richesses de la République Démocratique du Congo mis à place par le Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies, à ses pages 10, 11, 12, 13, la société DARAFORÉ est une société OUGANDO-THAÏLANDAISE qui participe activement au pillage systématique des richesses naturelles de la République Démocratique du Congo. Cette société était connue comme une société qui exploite seulement le bois, mais nous avons lu dans ce rapport qu'elle exporte aussi du colombo-tantalite et du diamant.
2. La société DARAFORÉ ne respecte pas la législation sociale en matière de salaire en République Démocratique du Congo. Tout son personnel est composé d'ouvriers journaliers sans contrat aucun avec la société, donc on peut être licencié n'importe quand ou n'importe comment, voir même que plusieurs de ces journaliers ne sont pas payés.

3. Après la vérification de certains de ses documents, la société DARAFORÉ ne paie aucune taxe au gouvernement congolais, toutes ses importations et exportations sont couvertes par des exonérations sur les frontières de la République démocratique du Congo pour être peut-être payées en Ouganda, cela montre que la société en question ne reconnaît pas la souveraineté de notre pays. Comment pouvons-nous accepter qu'une telle société continue à piller impunément les richesses de notre pays au détriment du peuple congolais, à exploiter continuellement les bûcherons et les creuseurs congolais du coltan.

Suite à tout ce qui précède, nous demandons :

- Le retour inconditionnel des troupes ougandaises, rwandaises et burundaises de la République Démocratique du Congo.  
Tous les autres points seront l'objet d'une négociation avec la délégation citée ci-dessous.

#### *D. De la négociation*

La Résistance Nationale Lumumbiste est prête à négocier avec une délégation africaine composée du Soudan, de la Libye, du Zimbabwe, de l'Angola, de l'Afrique du Sud et d'un observateur de la TROIKA (Belgique, France, Etats-Unis) sous la protection de la MONUC.

Si le Gouvernement Ougandais maintient en position d'utiliser la force pour libérer les otages, ce ne sera pas pour leur salut, car les bombes ougandaises ne vont pas trier nos militaires et les otages. Nous demandons à la communauté internationale de faire pression sur le Gouvernement Ougandais de ne pas utiliser la force car cette option est suicidaire pour les captifs.

Fait à Vurondo/Vihya, le 26 Mai 2001.

Le Secrétariat Général



Le Commandant MBUSA NDIME

From the reading of this document it is possible to define some features of Mayi-Mayi political discourse. The major subject, which is always emphasized, is the resistance to Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundian invasions. These states, according to Mayi-Mayi, are supported by western imperialist countries, above all the USA, and once in Congo they created some puppet rebel movements, such as the Mouvement de Liberation du Congo led By Jean-Pierre Bemba, to preserve their interests. This interpretation of the war, which is very popular in East Congo, can be summarised in the following points: first of all the war is caused by western countries, above all the USA, that aim to pillage Congolese natural resources; second, Rwanda and Uganda, and their pro-Tutsi governments, are considered the armed allies for this operation; third, the international community, since it does not oppose this situation, is an accomplice of the aggressors.

Such an interpretation is not unrealistic but it hides much more than it reveals. As we know, external intrusions, and not only from the USA, are a constant in Congolese history but this statement cannot justify an interpretation of the Congolese conflict simply as an expression of western neo-imperialism in alliance with Tutsis. This reductive interpretation, which denies the complexity of the Congolese conflict, is not ingenuous since the emphasis on the imperialistic matrix of the war made by Mayi-Mayi leaders, who refers to Marxist and nationalistic ideals, is functional to justify their own actions. This rhetoric covers up the real objectives which move most of Mayi-Mayi leaders to war: personal ambition for power, money, profit, etc. From this point of view, the Mayi-Mayi are another lost opportunity for the Kivu rural population to improve their living conditions: most of the factions have turned into private militias and are paid by big dealers who needed protection for their gold and coltan traffic.

Nevertheless the political rhetoric sustained by Mayi-Mayi finds a fertile ground in post-colonial Africa. According to Achille Mbembe<sup>40</sup>, Marxism and third-world ideology have led to a self-representation of Africans as victims of external prevarication. Even if this representation finds its justification in African history, it is often opportunistically exploited by political actors in search for legitimization and consensus. From this point of view, the political discourse of Mayi-Mayi is quite paradigmatic: many commanders have realized their own ambitions while hiding them behind the propaganda of self-defence and resistance to aggression. These arguments have been used to mobilize thousands of young people and children who actually did fight for less “noble” purposes, sometime even opposite to the ones declared by their military chiefs.

Despite the lack of a political project, many young people kept on fighting taking advantage of their condition of soldiers which allowed them to pillage and abuse civilians. Nevertheless many

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<sup>40</sup> Cfr. A. Mbembe, *African Modes of Self-Writing*, in «Public Culture», 2002, 14, pp. 239-273.

fighters felt betrayed by their commanders. A young man, who had been fighting with Mayi-Mayi, told me: «Now I do not believe in anything, I do not think about the future. The Mayi-Mayi have become like the other soldiers and they are paid by the traders». From these words emerges the regret for a failed rebellion and also the drama of a betrayed generation. As Ibrahim Abdullah has argued, «grotesque appropriation of what constitutes a revolutionary project produces grotesques results»<sup>41</sup>.

## 9. Conclusions

Without doubt there cannot be peace unless African societies address the needs of young people<sup>42</sup>, and this is particularly true in Congo. The reconstruction of the Congolese state is an indispensable condition to confront some fundamental problems such as the restoration of a legal system, the re-establishment of a school system, and the restart of a legal economy which could absorb young workers.

Nevertheless, the youth problem is not exclusively material but also moral. The Congolese peace project has followed a perverse schema: many political leaders and military commanders, responsible for innumerable atrocities, have been “rewarded” with honourable posts in the government of transition and the new national army. Many Mayi-Mayi commanders have been compensated for their war efforts and they are now senators, deputies or generals. Nowadays, some of these leaders will present themselves at the national election, foreseen in July 2006: the ones who have funds will likely be elected while the ones who have little chance will try to hinder the electoral process. The point is that in Congo violence has been shown to work and to recompense the ones that make use of it. What will be the consequences of this affirmation of violence on the new generations? Why should young people not resort to violence if it works? How will this affect the social *habitus*?

These questions delineate, from my point of view, some serious problems for the future. By now, most of the Mayi-Mayi groups have been demilitarised according to the DDR (Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration) plan which has been implemented in Congo. Mayi-Mayi popularity progressively decreased during the years of the war. If in 1996, during the AFDL campaign, they were considered as invincible and fearless warriors, in recent years most of the

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<sup>41</sup>IAbdullah I., (2005), cit., p. 184.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. A. De Waal & N. Argenti (eds.), *Young Africa: Realising the Rights of Children and Youth*, Africa World Press, Trenton, 2002, p. 155.



people started to consider them as simple bandits. If the decrease of the popularity of Mayi-Mayi could create some problems for the reintegration of ex-fighters, who risk being stigmatized and pushed to rejoin militias, on the other hand a demystification of the phenomenon could diminish its attractiveness. Nevertheless, if Congo political leaders are unable to seize the opportunity for peace, it is likely that young fighters screaming “*mayi-mayi*” will run again in the Kivu hills.

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