

COLUMN: AFRICA AND SCIENCE

Kabila comes in from the shadows

Let us briefly quote a philosopher who is not very popular nowadays: "... *so the spirit forming himself, ripens towards a new figure, and sheds from himself piece by piece the construction of his former world, its change only indicated by small symptoms; the frivolity just as the hesitation, entering into the existing, the vague feeling of an unknown are the presages that something different is coming. This steady crumbling away, that does not alter the physiognomy of the whole, is interrupted by the dawn presenting, in a flash, the construction of the new world*"¹. Or: "[...] *the laws organizing a whole only have a meaning for the past, and they refer to a figure and an individuality that is left as a dead envelope a long time ago*"². During the emergence of the new epoch, observers tend only to look at the remnants of the figures of the past, at the empty "physiognomy of the whole", at the laws and institutions left over as an empty envelope, without noticing the dawning beyond. This is exactly what has happened to most observers of the Congolese political evolutions in recent years.

Looking back at the most recent events, one could be tempted to make an analysis in terms of "the revenge of history". It could appear that deeply-seated cleavage in Zairian political life has come to the surface again: the return of the old nationalist and unitarist lumumbist movement, temporarily defeated in the sixties, but now recovering its lost position with full force, pushing out the formers winners. These were the pro-western Binza group, with Mobutu, Nendaka, Bomboko, once allied with the second group, the federalist constellation around the Luluabourg constitution, with Ileo, Lihau, Tshisekedi (whom we found back at the time of the Sovereign National Conference). Our attention to the return of Kabila, of Mulele's son and cousin, of Kanza, of the diffuse lumumbist diaspora, should not, however, divert us from more long-term

¹ G.W.F. HEGEL, *Von wissenschaftlichen Erkennen*, Hamburg, 1952, p. 15-16.

² G.W.F. HEGEL, *Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts*, Hamburg, 1983, p. 176.

developments.

Mobutu had already blurred this picture, by trying to integrate the lumumbist heritage into his symbolic and patronage politics. Have we not seen the return of old revolutionaries as Mandungu or Gbenye under the wings of the nation's father? Do we forget that Kabila's first Minister of Transport was a member of the September 1960 government that had toppled Lumumba? It seems as if we have lost our capacity to notice the big gulfstream of the international arena, forces that are much more powerful than any "revolutionary" project. It was very short-sighted to think that the globalization of the world economy would not have any effect on Congo-Zaire's mining sector, especially at a time when this whole sector was caught in a huge restructuring turmoil, fundamentally weakening the big mining monopolies. Even on a regional level, we seemed to think that the reconstruction of the African political space as the progressive crystallization of regional hegemonies around Nigeria, South Africa and Uganda/Kenya, would leave Congo-Zaire unaffected. On another level, we have been unable to read the deeper meaning of the social movements in Congo-Zaire; Zairian society knew for several years already that the solution was no longer to be found in Kinshasa, that maybe the frightening prospect of a war was the only way out. All attention has been given to the level of state institutions, these having become the scene for a shadow theatre manned by the "political class" and playing mainly to foreign audiences. "Political Science" has also been the prisoner of the political and juridical sophisms of Kinshasa's politicians, and has not even analyzed the different kinds of relationships existing between real or faked opposition politicians and the population.

This inability to reason beyond the borders traced by the media and the usual patterns of thinking about Central African affairs has its cause. The old personal networks between Congolese and Belgian politicians and researchers are worn out and have not been renewed or rejuvenated.. The scientific infrastructure that was at our disposal in Congo-Zaire does not exist any more. The new Congo is no longer to be found in the African Library (if it ever was), but on the Internet. As often is the case, the whites were too late for the battle. We could add here a citation of an even more unpopular philosopher: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living"³.

³ Karl MARX, Introduction to *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, 1852.

Finally, the events in Congo display an "adjustment" to reality. The time is gone when Belgium was the only superpower involved in Congo-Zaire. Everybody stuck to a series of illusions, but the country now gets the kind of attention required by its size and importance, even if this international attention still is very much ambiguous. The country has finally opened itself to the world, and has freed itself from the remnants of the old colonialism. It remains doubtful whether this old type will be replaced by a new one - regional or international. But still, events in Congo-Zaire must convince us of the need for a new way of looking, preferably together with Congolese friends who will undoubtedly no longer be found in the high spheres of responsibility. Yet this time we'll have to learn to listen, something we have seldom done.

Erik Kennes

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TRIBUNE LIBRE : **L'AFRIQUE ET LES SCIENCES**

Le nouveau Kabila est arrivé

La restructuration spectaculaire de l'Afrique Centrale a pris de court tous les observateurs - y inclus les politologues, ceux qui devraient analyser les tendances lourdes plutôt que les spectacles médiatiques. C'est que, tout simplement, notre regard s'est estompé au fil des années.

La montée fulgurante de l'AFDL, vite symbolisée par la résurgence de Kabila, semble à première vue un retour sur les devants de la scène des grands conflits des années soixante, autour des mêmes protagonistes. L'héritage nationaliste et unitariste pourrait prendre sa revanche sur la tendance pro-occidentale et la tendance fédéraliste, incarnée par les participants à la commission constitutionnelle de Luluabourg (avec e.a. Ileo, Tshisekedi). La CNS, héritière de Lulabourg, contre le nationalisme révolutionnaire de Mulele, du CNL, de Kabila? Ce serait de nouveau faire preuve de notre incapacité à aller au-delà du trompe-l'oeil des années soixante.

Ce serait oublier que Mobutu a habilement intégré des aspects du "lumumbisme" et qu'il a ainsi brouillé les cartes. Ce serait oublier les grands mouvements internationaux que nous n'avons pas perçus à temps, et qui seront de loin plus forts que tout projet révolutionnaire. La "science politique" a trop longtemps braqué son regard sur l'état et ses institutions, et a été piégé par son attention quasi exclusive pour les sophismes politiques et juridiques des politiciens de Kinshasa. L'état zaïrois était devenu une dépouille vide. L'essentiel était ailleurs: au niveau infra-étatique, des mouvements sociaux dont nous n'avons pas pu déchiffrer la signification. La société zaïroise bloquée savait déjà qu'il n'y avait plus de solution durable hors d'une lutte armée. Au niveau supra-étatique, les effets de la mondialisation économique sur la restructuration massive du secteur minier et ses conséquences possible pour le Zaïre n'ont pas été perçus. Les mouvements d'une restructuration de l'espace politique africain autour des hégémonies régionales (Nigéria, Afrique de Sud, Ouganda/Kenya...) n'ont pas été prises en compte.

Nous avons été incapables de raisonner hors des schémas habituels, nous étions prisonniers des média. C'est que les anciens réseaux personnels tissés entre la Belgique et le Congo sont épuisés et qu'ils n'ont pas été renouvelés. C'est que l'infrastructure scientifique dont nous disposions au Congo et en Belgique est délabrée. Le nouveau Congo? N'allez plus à la bibliothèque africaine, consultez Internet. Comme souvent, les blancs ont été en retard d'une bataille.

Les évolutions au Congo auront au moins rendu visible un ajustement des apparences à la réalité: fini le temps où seul le Congo pensait encore que la Belgique est une superpuissance. Cette modestie regagnée ne nous dispenserait pas pour autant du devoir d'un autre regard. De préférence avec nos amis congolais, qui ne seront plus ceux qu'on retrouve dans les hautes sphères de responsabilité. Au moins si nous voulons les écouter, ça nous ne l'avons jamais vraiment fait. Autrement, nous l'aurions su.

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