

## **Revisiting Lumumba's Political Identity Through a Colonial Lens in De-Colonial Congo (1956-1965)**

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### **Introduction**

In June 1960, the Congolese people elected Patrice Lumumba as Prime Minister in the Congo's first democratic elections. By January 1961, the CIA-financed Belgium troops to kidnap, torture, and dismember Lumumba's body in barrels of acid. Historians like Adam Hoschild and Frederick Cooper have considered the era of Congolese decolonization as a singular event followed by the U.S. financed dictatorship over the African country. Historians Bruce Kulick and Georges Ntalaja-Nzongola have focused on Patrice Lumumba's involvement in politics as Prime Minister and how Western mining interests paved the way for his abrupt assassination. This metanarrative suggests that the Congo's place in world history is a byproduct of Western / European neo-colonialism. Historians have rarely debated Belgium's attempt to directly discredit Lumumba's legacy. Though Lumumba once supported the colonial government, European and Western powers fought endlessly in the media to discredit his politics and personal integrity.

In this paper, I wanted to visit the colonial struggle to delegitimize Patrice Lumumba through the media. Delegitimization is used here because Belgium knew Lumumba's vision of independence and the potential to succeed in breaking free of colonial exploitation. Belgium's colonial government needed a way to continue their material and economic exploitation while painting Lumumba's effort for immediate independence as a fraud. I set out to uncover this process and Lumumba's attempt to legitimize himself against the colonial narrative. This paper sets out to explore the struggle between colonial and African media to influence the outcome of

Congo's independence. It will argue that from 1955 to 1965, Belgium and the United States sought to protect their economic exploitation of the Congo by using the media to delegitimize Patrice Lumumba's political legacy as violent, uncivilized, and unworthy of independence.

## Scholarly discussion

*King Leopold's Ghost* by Adam Hoschild and *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila* by Georges Ntalaja Nzongola both consider Congolese history from Belgium's colonial era to the late 1900's. Both historians shed light on the political and economic mechanisms of Belgium's colonial rule and the socio-economic effects they produced leading up to independence. Many of these mechanisms included the monopolization of mining and urban industries. Hoschild focuses on the African Trust Committee and their efforts to inform the public on the Congo's colonial history. Hoschild glosses over Lumumba's impact on the Congo as a product of Western intervention in decolonial Congo and fails to complicate his legacy. Nzongola considers Lumumba's Pan-Africanist legacy in the post-1960 era as a tool by Mobutu Sese Soko (Congo's Prime Minister 1965-1997) to manipulate his image as a fighter for freedom while exploiting the Congo's people.<sup>1</sup> In short, both works consider Lumumba's Pan-African legacy as a single point in Congo history-separate from the suggested economic ways in which the country can become economically self-sufficient in recent years.

Similarly, Frederick Cooper sheds light on Patrice Lumumba's Pan-Africanist legacy in the context of African decolonization by arguing that European decolonization was a gradual, complicated process. Cooper explained that European countries quickly injected neocolonial influence as a result of decolonization. Cooper considers the Belgium decolonization of the Congo from the Stanleyville Riots and the rise of the MNC-K and the MNC-L.<sup>2</sup> Both Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) political parties promoted Congolese independence and

hoped to control political power after the country's elections. Lumumba quickly became the face of the MNC-L part. In any case, Cooper reveals to the reader that Belgium hoped minor improvements to healthcare, education, and politics would ease Congolese desire for independence. Like Hoschild and Nzongola, Cooper complicates the era of decolonization by introducing neo-colonialism – specifically how Belgium and Western-backed mining companies influenced Cold War politics in decolonial Congo. Like the previous historians, Cooper suggests a list of independent economic and political frameworks that may push the Congo to its full potential – free of neocolonial interference.<sup>3</sup> But, as Cooper considers this framework for the African continent, he fails to transcend Lumumba's political impact during decolonization as lens historians can use to study contemporary history.

Dieder Gondola's *History of the Congo* continues the trend of considering Lumumba as a snippet in Congo history through geopolitical statistics, specifically in chapter 8. Here, Gondola allows us to understand Belgium and Western country's economic role in exploiting the Congo. Through Gondola's analysis of Belgium's import and exports of precious minerals like cobalt, gold, and uranium, Gondola connected histories of Western countries with the Congo.<sup>3</sup> Contrasting to other African countries, Gondola's work illuminates on years of colonial domination over these minerals as to how the country fared differently than the rest of Africa. Evidentially, the years of Joseph Mobutu's oppressive, exploitative government through the late 1900's overshadowed Lumumba's impacting political legacy in this book. This work matters, however, because it contradicts Europe's economic justification for colonialism. It allows the reader to understand that Belgium and Western involvement occurred with one purpose: exploitation of labor and minerals.

A different section of scholarly work focused on the involvement of foreign government in the death of Patrice Lumumba. Bruce Kuklick and Emmanuel Gerard argue that Patrice Lumumba's death was a product of four principal factors that included a compilation of inexperienced Congolese politicians, the crystallization of neocolonialism, the U. N's lackluster attempt to ease political tension, and the United States' evil goals of influencing foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Both historians uncover that international politics and U.S foreign policy through interrogation of government sources. Kuklick and Gerard shed light on the rigid effects of every major player in Lumumba's assassination, but they also shed light on the responsibility held by Western and European powers hold in the decolonization and exploitation of a nearly 30-year time period after Lumumba's death.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, Ralph Austen illuminates Lumumba's political life from his involvement in politics to the complicated events that led to his death at the hands of Belgian officials.<sup>6</sup> Austen, however, finds that both the U.N. and Moise Tshombe were responsible for destabilizing Lumumba as Prime Minister. Austen's perspective on the Katanga secession matters because it allows us to understand in concise detail who was responsible for Lumumba's death. Though Belgium backed the Katanga secession, Austen finds that UN help to end the secession was ill-advised and influenced by the U.S. and their Cold War agenda in the Congo. Building off this, Nzongola argues in *Ralph Bunche and the first Congo Crisis* that Ralph Bunche's personal dislike of Lumumba played a decisive role in the order that ultimately killed Lumumba. Shortly after Lumumba became Prime Minister, Lumumba and President Kasa-vubu's conflicting political agendas for the Congo were at the center stage of the Congo crisis.<sup>7</sup> Ralph Bunch, a member of the U.N., held meetings in which he portrayed Lumumba as a hostile man. This work matters because it allows us to understand who was partially responsible for the death of Congo's

first Prime Minister. It also sheds light on a little-mentioned link in the Lumumba case: Belgium's effort to attack Lumumba.

Few historians have directly analyzed Lumumba's legacy by connecting him extensively to U.S. and World history. Rubango considers the legacy of Lumumba in Patrice Lumumba at the crossroads of *Truth and Myth, Weighing Fact and From Fiction* – arguing that a scholar's personal view on Lumumba dictates the outcome of Lumumba based research.<sup>8</sup> Born in the Congo, Lumumba lived his late twenties admiring Belgian attempt to civilize Congolese citizens. Rubangop's perspective is shaped by his analysis of oral histories like speeches and cables. Specifically, Rubangop's perspective sheds light on the effects of Lumumba's legacy in Lumumbists post-1960. Joseph Mobutu, leader of the Congo in the mid 1960's, saw these Lumumbists as a political threat and soon murdered many of them. Rubangop's perspective serves as a justification to consider Lumumba's legacy in the realm of world history. It establishes the importance of the Lumumbist legacy – explaining how people like Joseph Mobutu capitalized on the late Prime Minister's legacy to gain false hope. Rubapango, unlike other scholars, introduces Lumumba's international political impact after the 1960's. This work matters because it demonstrates the genesis of Belgium's attempt to continue to suppress Lumumba's political identity after his assassination. Consequently, this essay examines Belgium's delegitimization of Lumumba by combining the style of the historians mentioned above. It will focus first on Belgium's influence and then branch out into the U.S. and U.N. as the scholarly discussion did.

## Methodology

My research on colonial attempts to delegitimize Lumumba's political identity required a variety of complex sources. These sources include oral and media histories retrieved from U.N.,

C.I.A, Belgium, L.A. Times, N.Y. Times, and Life magazine digital archives. Additionally, French written sources have been respectfully translated to English. Speeches from Lumumba and King Boudain of Belgium serve as a contextual foundation that further strengthens the thesis through the subsequent sections. These sources touch on Belgium's language to describe Congolese citizens as savage and backwards nations. They serve as benchmarks to understand certain language that arose in U.N. or CIA documents that served as a front for the development of Western business interests in the Congo—the topics of sections two and three.

## Historical Background

### A plan for Independence

The terrible, violent rule of King Leopold often distinguishes the Congo's colonial history. Leopold quickly developed a labor system that not only exploited the Congo's natural resources but also mutilated workers who did not meet daily quotas.<sup>9</sup> Even after Belgium controlled the Congo in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Congolese citizens continued to suffer. However, they also found many ways to contest colonial rule. One of Belgium's major impacts on the Congo was the lack of education and economic prosperity. By 1950, as the African continent started to grow independent, Belgium hoped minor improvement in society would convince the Congolese to remain silent<sup>3</sup>.

In June 1960, Patrice Lumumba became Prime Minister of the Congo. His hope for the country boiled down to true independence.<sup>10</sup> This political view would also be known as Pan-Africanism. While Belgium supported the decision for Congo's independence, support was not black and white. Even when considering Belgium's shift between gradual independence and sudden decolonization of the Congo, the process of decolonization contained obscure agendas.

Belgium's desire to maintain rule over the Congo often collided with Lumumba and the radical theory of Pan-Africanism. How did the colonial government work to delegitimize Lumumba? How did this message crystalize? Did Lumumba always pose a political threat to the colonial order? This section suggests answers.

Before 1958, Belgium hardly expressed concern toward Lumumba's political identity because he supported the colonial system's mission to civilize the Congo. Lumumba's main support for colonialism focused on Belgium's initial justification rooted in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Much of this is evident in his book *Congo, My Country* where he addresses his support for Belgium's "task to civilize the Congo."<sup>11</sup> These words echo David Livingstone's 1857 speech where Livingstone stated that the European mission in the Congo was to "to open a path to this district, that civilization, commerce, and Christianity might find their way there [in Central Congo]."<sup>12</sup> During this time, Livingstone was a pioneer for European exploration of the Congo because he encouraged European men like King Leopold to desire the Congo's resources. During 1958, Lumumba's political identity posed no threat to the colonial system. Most importantly, this juxtaposition allows us to understand that even after hundreds of years in the Congo, Belgium's mission remained unchanged. When Lumumba did not object to Belgium's colonial agenda, Belgium had no problem with him. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that Belgium's delegitimization of Lumumba did not appear because of Lumumba's character or personality. Rather, it crystalized after Lumumba magnified a radical political identity that threatened Belgium's financial stake in the Congo's mines.

Ultimately, Belgium decided they could not leave the Congo to fend for itself and decided that gradual independence would be suitable for the Congolese to handle. Before considering Lumumba's new anti-colonial attitude, we must understand why Lumumba's desire

for immediate independence was frowned upon. One of the main reasons for this would be Belgium and Western economic interests in Katanga's mines that the paper will discuss later on. However, no other document grasps Belgium's gradual plan for independence more than the Van Bilsen Plan. Drafted by Professor Van Bilsen, the Belgium government planned on a 30-year agenda to decolonize the Congo because it would be "unfortunate if we [Belgium] let ourselves fall into these events."<sup>13</sup> Those events referred to the Congolese's violent actions if independence occurred too quickly – given their natural violent behavior. The plan depicts Belgium as the country worried about the safety of Congolese citizens. Belgium realized that they could still afford to give independence to the Congolese people while enforcing Belgium's vision as a rescuer/peacekeeper in an uncivilized country. In a way, the Van Bilsen plan stated that if violent protests occurred in opposition to the 30-year plan it would not have been Belgium's fault. The Van Bilsen plan became a possible genesis of delegitimization against Lumumba because it served as a precursor to stain any anti-Belgium controlled decolonization as violent.

1958 marked the time Patrice Lumumba shifted to a radical view on independence – supporting immediate freedom from the colonial government. The event that pushed Lumumba to support Congolese independence was the Pan Africanist Conference of 1958.<sup>14</sup> Lumumba's political crusade to spread support of Pan-Africanism initiated his political identity in favor of independence. Though in support of political and economic freedom, Lumumba recognized that the Congo had to step away from the Van Bilsen plan. He called for an awakening. The awakening would refer to the needed shift in attitude against the colonial system. Lumumba understood that for Congo to be truly independent, he would have to obtain a political identity that refused to settle for anything less than full independence. Lumumba also recognized that this political identity relied on unity between Congolese and Belgium citizens. Lumumba knew that



violence was not the answer because violent outbursts against the colonial government would increase the rift between Belgium and Congolese citizens. Violence would also prove Belgium correct in that the Congolese were not ready to handle independence. In essence, Lumumba shaped his political identity in a way that required European and African cooperation to develop a beneficial, non-exploitative relationship.

However, Lumumba did not invent this political identity but rather magnified an already established vision for Congo's independence. Congolese citizens found their support toward independence several years before Lumumba established his political presence. The Congolese political party ABAKO published a counterargument to the Van Bilsen plan in 1956. The political party demanded the Congolese people's rights to vote in favor of basic human rights.<sup>15</sup> Nowhere, however, does ABAKO promote violence toward colonial officers. It calls for no violence, but rather the contest of colonial rule. ABAKO made it clear that the only solution for the years ahead would be the disintegration of Belgium's colonial system through non-violent resistance. Though separated by a couple of years, Belgium became concerned with Lumumba because of the growing support of Pan-Africanist independence challenged the established colonial authority. Parallels between ABAKO and Lumumba's political identity suggests a reason why many Congolese citizens supported Lumumba. Many of these parallels included support for suffrage and African ownership of Katanga mines. However, Belgium realized that continued opposition to the Van Bilsen plan endangered their ability to exploit the Congo's labor and natural resources. In short, Belgium wanted to continue guiding the Congo to empty promises because they would only benefit from their fruits of labor.

Shortly thereafter, Belgium utilized the media to delegitimize Lumumba by connecting him to the concept of uncivilized peoples as mentioned in the Van Bilsen plan. In 1959 Belgium

officials broke up a “violent”, illegal riot. Congolese citizens reportedly rioted against the colonial government, demanding immediate independence, and attacking buildings and white Belgium citizens. The Los Angeles Times article described the Congolese people as irate with spears and arrows.<sup>16</sup> The difference between bows and arrows and Belgium’s guns demonstrates that Belgium was a technologically ‘superior’ nation. Moreover, the article lets us know that it can be connected to Belgium’s view on the Van Bilsen plan. Since the Congolese people wanted immediate independence, they became wild and violent – the opposite of Van Bilsen’s goal. Belgium credited Lumumba as the source of violence against the colonial government. However, later reports mentioned there was little evidence that Lumumba initiated violence.<sup>17</sup> However, Belgium insisted on slapping Lumumba with criminal charges of inciting violence. A similar pattern occurred in the Stanleyville riots. However, even when the November report labeled Lumumba the culprit of stirring up violence once again, the theory of the Van Bilsen plan resurfaced. This type of colonial propaganda made it clear that the Congolese people were so “native” they needed one voice to channel their inner violence.<sup>18</sup>

Belgium continued to delegitimize Lumumba by using newspapers to paint themselves as the paternal figure that was meant to care for the savage country while damaging the alliance of Africans and Europeans. In Belgium’s mind, if they could maintain peace, they should control independence. This is evident when analyzing the days after Belgium mellowed a Lumumba ‘led’ riot. Peaceful and quiet seemed to be Belgium’s chosen words to describe a Congo in control of the colonial system once the riots seized. The only sound to disturb the noises of peace would be the soft music pouring out through villages.<sup>19</sup> Belgium only intensified their use of media outlets to dehumanize the independence struggle by furthering tension between Africans and Lumumba. Knowing Lumumba’s goal was to unify African and Belgium citizens, the

colonial government gave themselves the political identity which could provide shelter or safety for those affected by Lumumba's apparent violence. Belgium's effort, however, continued in later reports to create the Congolese people as inherently savage. In a way, the colonial government was arguing that they wanted a peaceful 30-year plan, but violence occurred when the Congolese demanded immediate independence. This attempt to dehumanize independence was calculated. Belgium's goal was to prove that the Congolese people were not worthy of independence and inherently uncivilized. Georges Ntalaja Nzongola and Bruce Kuklick directly contribute this colonial product as a great influencer on Lumumba's political life<sup>5</sup>. Both historians agree that Belgium's colonial rule created a surplus of uneducated Congolese politicians. They also agreed that these politicians would not be able to guide the Congo through independence.

Belgium's delegitimization campaign continued in the media – this time by trying to salvage their economic interests by supporting gradual independence through the Congo's urban development. The word development is used with caution in this subsection as it can hint that Africa is not a normal nation. In *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Walter Rodney argues that Europe's industrial needs created a colonial need for raw materials that prevented African countries to produce self-sufficient industries.<sup>20</sup> Rodney allows us to understand that Europe primarily utilized the use of urbanization to mask their material exploitation. Max Lerner of the L.A. Times argues that Congolese citizens were not able to appreciate the urbanization and factory jobs produced by Belgium because of tribal affairs.<sup>21</sup> Inherently, Lerner was saying that Congolese people were too busy fighting over problems Belgium wanted to fix. For instance, Congolese people were rioting for freedom while Belgium supported gradual independence. Belgium also knew that the more they could delegitimize Lumumba, the greater chance they

would have to continue development. In this context, development meant a relationship between Europe forcing the country to give up minerals while creating an indebted, monopolized workforce. While Rodney put development into words, Lerner's article proves how Belgium utilized development in their favor

Additionally, Lerner's article hints that Lumumba's Pan-Africanist identity changed nothing in the Congo. By reading through the lines, Belgium is magnifying the idea that Lumumba's political identity is pushing citizens to become lazy and neglect their jobs and industries. Belgium advanced the delegitimization of Lumumba by implying they were responsible for the Congo's urban economy. By reading in-between the lines, Belgium made it known that Lumumba's politics would prevent the economic prosperity of the Congo. By this point, Belgium appeared to have been branding Lumumba as the representation of people who would rather protest than work. Of course, the colonial government made no mention of their direct involvement in forcing the working people into mines or other any place with horrendous labor conditions. The article confirms that while Belgium wanted development and non-violence, Lumumba's violent nature would slow down progress.

This section attempted to cover a possible genesis for Belgium's delegitimization of Lumumba through the media. Often times, the colonial government would connect Lumumba with words like violent and uncivilized to reiterate the ideas why they initially colonized Congo. However, if Belgium's delegitimization tactics were plotted on a vertex, Lumumba's true political identity would be marked on a completely different axis. The section "matters" because it demonstrates how the colonial government prioritized its economic well-being over the liberties of the oppressed. It demonstrated that the colonial government feared not only an educated politician but a politician that challenged the status quo. Among many others,

Lumumba would become that politician. In June 1960, Patrice Lumumba delivered a speech at the Congo's Day of Independence. However, the U.S. and U.N would join Belgium in stirring an already boiling pot of anti-Lumumba media campaigns. Through Lumumba, Belgium's economic nightmare was becoming a reality.<sup>22</sup>

## Belgium and the U.N: United against Lumumba

While Belgium financed the Katanga secession to counter Lumumba's Pan-Africanist goals in 1960, Lumumba asked the U.N. to aid his fight to expel Belgium troops from the Congo. On the surface, the U. N's presence was meant to defuse the situation and restore peace. However, the goal of peace was not black and white. Even while the U.N. did not intend to kill Lumumba, the organization was not free of Belgium and Western manipulation to pursue economic and political interests. How did Belgium seek to delegitimize Lumumba's political identity through the U.N? This question becomes far more complicated when considering the U.N.'s initial goal to bring peace to the Congo. When the U.S. became involved, how did they attempt to delegitimize Lumumba? Was the U.N.'s effort justified or unfound? This section suggests a few answers.

Even after Belgium financed the Katanga secession, Belgium used their media and colonial presence to influence an anti-Lumumba rhetoric in the U.N. Belgium's influence on U.N. officials in the Congo crystallized quickly and occurred in two waves. The first wave came through the U.N.'s predetermined perceptions as a consequence of Belgium's colonial system. Ralph Bunche, a well-known U.N. diplomat famous for his efforts to control the Suez conflict, became one of the principal men in charge of mediating the tension between Congo and Katanga.<sup>23</sup> His memoir offers incredible insight into how the U.N. viewed the Congo and Patrice Lumumba. The main complaint from the letter pertained to the Congo's lack of educated people

and urbanization. Bunche recounts how difficult it was to set up an office because there were no clean buildings in the area and far too much African-led violence. Bunche also credited much of the Congo's issues with the lack of educated, skilled men who knew nothing about political affairs. The media's contribution to this situation is suggested because Bunche appeared to have a strictly negative, degrading view of Lumumba. This suggests that Bunche subscribed to many negative media influences that pushed his view on Lumumba as irrational.

Ralph Bunche's letter resonates with Walter Rodney's theory of underdevelopment which becomes known when looking at Boudain's words. King Boudain made no mistake when he mentioned how the colonial system viewed the Congo. Despite colonial attempts to urbanize and civilize the Congo, Boudain made it clear his vision of the African country was to treat it like an enterprise. Thus, Belgium's primary motive in the Congo was to profit from material exploitation. When Ralph Bunche arrived in the Congo, his perception in the Congo was indirectly delegitimizing Patrice Lumumba and the Congolese people. Bunche, like many people who were unfamiliar with the history of the Congo, credited his struggle to find peace to the uneducated population in the Congo. Even as Bunch's main objective was peace, his animosity grew toward Lumumba's character and image rather than his ability to negotiate the removal of Belgium troops. While Bunche's vision on the Congo was not a projection of Belgium beliefs, it was a product of colonial rule. Up until this point, media outlets informed the world of how chaotic the Congo had become. Bunche eventually became a benchmark to the supposed reality of the Congo because of his status in the U.N and his ability to voice his opinion on powerful political stages. By reading between the lines, Bunche's letter worked to delegitimize Lumumba because it indirectly stated that the Congo needed Belgium and U.N. presence to remotely succeed.

Even as previous historians have debated this subtopic, Belgium pushed the delegitimization of Lumumba deeper than Ralph Bunche's influence. In late 1960, Joseph Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba from office and Joseph Mobutu arrested him shortly after. Certainly, Ralph Bunche was not powerful enough to completely delegitimize Lumumba. There was plenty of truth to the theory that both men simply could not cooperate due to personality clashes. Many of Bunche's complaints about Lumumba, as explained by Georges Nzongola, were that Lumumba lacked the proper temperament to solve the issue. Historians like Nzongola and Crawford have complicated Bunche's involvement in the Congo and offered suggestions as to how these tensions led to Lumumba's death. However, as much as these tensions were a reality, the U.N.'s involvement in the Congo was an extensive vertex occupied by several characters. A third party no doubt became involved in delegitimizing Lumumba's struggle for independence while masking their efforts in the name of Democracy.

The U.N. further advanced its anti-Lumumba identity by magnifying the role of Cold War politics in the Congo. The situation became sticky after Belgium financed the Katanga secession. The theory was that the U.N. would end the secession. However, the news journal *Fighting Talk* covers a brief portion of Conor O'Brian's memoir of his time in the U.N. The former U.N. agent revealed the primary goals for the Congo Club. For one, the Congo Club would uphold the UN's integrity while in the Congo. However, the Congo Club would also advance any agenda that opposed communism – no matter the cost. In other words, if any type of communism would arise, stopping it would trump anything – even the Congo constitution or any U.N. policy.<sup>24</sup> The U.N. had arrived in the Congo with the notion that Communism was the greatest threat. The U.S. and U.N. did not fear that a single country would become communist. Rather, they feared the Congo would be the first domino to fall in a chain reaction. The only

thing the U.S. was missing was a definitive link between Lumumba and communism to advance delegitimization.

Contact, an independent newspaper, sheds light on how this communist connection that Belgium ‘exposed’ to delegitimize Lumumba. The big three (U.N. U.S. and Belgium) realized that for the U.N. to achieve their goal in the Congo, they would have to suppress any signs of communism. In other words, the U.S., U.N., and Belgium weren’t concerned with what type of Communism would be introduced in the Congo – if any. They specifically mentioned that any relationship with Communism would be condemned. Disintegration, communism, and chaos were tied in the eyes of Belgium, the U.N., and the U.S. Most of this crystalized after Lumumba’s political inexperience, a product of the colonial system, forced Lumumba to seek help from the USSR. In reality, Lumumba asked the USSR for military aid and vehicles to aid his fight against Belgium soldiers who terrorized the Congo. He had no plans on adopting Stalin-style communism—let alone support the Soviets in the arms race. However, this decision was the go ahead for the Big Three to hammer an anti-Lumumba identity. In their minds, if Lumumba asked for Communist aid now, what would he do in the future? This fear stemmed from previous countries that sought Communist aid – like North Korea in the early 1950s.

In the U.S, the delegitimization campaign continued by connecting Lumumba to the image of an uncivilized, dangerous communist. Posters depicted Lumumba as a snake that would choke the U.N. The photo in chapter 5, seen below, suggests that Lumumba’s political power is out of control.<sup>25</sup> It demonstrates the image of Paternalism. The serpent’s face, clearly sporting the physical appearance of Lumumba, suggests that the U.N. was powerless against Lumumba’s vicious demands and character. The image supports the idea of chaos in the sense that Lumumba is violent, willing to advance his political agenda. This type of propaganda lets the public, who



might not have been informed about the Congolese affairs, believe that Lumumba was in fact an irrational person to work with. More importantly, these words echoed what Ralph Bunche thought of while working with Lumumba. A man like Lumumba was angry and irrational—thus being the cause of little improvement in the Congo’s political situation. For the U.S., the goal was to allow people to believe that Lumumba was connected to people like Stalin or Mao Zedong.

Additionally, both Contact and Bunche continued to delegitimize Lumumba’s struggle for independence by connecting Lumumba with chaos and despair. Juxtaposition becomes a critical tool to read between the lines of the situation. On a surface level, Contact described Bunche as the savior of Africa.<sup>26</sup> Lumumba, trying to clear the air on the Congo's situation, explained in a U.N. press conference that the success of the Congo's future depended on several factors. Congolese and U.N. objectives would have to coincide – meaning that the U.N. would have to follow the country's constitution which forbid the U.N. from military action on Congo soil.<sup>27</sup> Though Bunche’s letter agreed to do this, Belgium and the U.N. did not shy from placing the entire blame of chaos on Lumumba. Moreover, Life Magazine reports quickly followed the political agenda of delegitimizing Lumumba’s struggle for independence. This particular magazine issue labeled Lumumba and his chaos in the Congo as “an infection that spread to untreated places.”<sup>28</sup> This subtle jab toward Lumumba allows us to understand that the U.N. and U.S. were in a fight against someone that would continue to pose a threat while alive. Like a virus, Lumumba's influence would not die until every part of him was eradicated. In other words, chaos would persist as long as Lumumba was in power. Lumumba, on one hand, shared a hopeful but realistic goal where that he admittedly could not materialize on his own. The image

of a virus is perhaps the best example of Belgium's delegitimization because it brands Lumumba's political identity as an uncontrollable and irrational evil.

However, it is important to recognize the other reasons why the U.S. sought to damage Lumumba's political identity. Lumumba's attempts to legitimize his fight for independence, for the most part, were ignored. Bruce Kuklick and Emmanuel Gerard developed a critical study of archival material that demonstrated that the U.S. became invested in stopping Lumumba after pressure from Belgium. Their work concludes that Belgium did not approve of the U.S. treatment of Lumumba during his visit to the White House. Much of this frustration came to fruition from Lumumba's inexperienced politics. However, by probing deeper into Belgium and U.S.' African economic interests, it becomes clearer why delegitimization became so relentless.

Furthermore, Belgium and the U.S. continued their delegitimization of Lumumba to preserve their economic interests in the Katanga mines. For one, Belgium's hesitance to free the Congo was understandable in a colonial context. King Boudain considered the country an enterprise—suggesting that Belgium sought to profit from the Congo's labor.<sup>29</sup> What about the United States? And the U.N.? For the United States, Lumumba's fight for independence was an unfavorable business move. Lumumba represented a group of people that would jeopardize the U.S.'s stake in Congo's uranium and other profitable minerals. For the United States, the connection between Lumumba and inexperienced politics might not have been enough to convince U.S. officials to remove Lumumba. However, it was enough evidence to brand him as a madman due to his demands of peace and independence. As previously stated, the U.S. believed that if Lumumba asked the Soviets for help (no matter how little that help was), the Congo would fall to communism—much like Cuba would eventually side with the USSR. The U.S. could not let this happen because the Congo was the source of its uranium. Uranium, as anyone who is

familiar with U.S. history, was the key element in creating the atomic bomb and a component in advancing the arms race.

The political threat Lumumba posed came in the form of minerals and materials like rubber and Uranium. Dieder Gondola expressed a unique quantitative study when considering the exports of minerals and rubber to the United States during the eve of WW2. But as this paper strides to become a contributor to previous scholarly conversations, we will visit another version of quantitative data to further explore why the U.S. continued to delegitimize Lumumba as an uncivilized character. For an answer, we can examine a chart on *Fighting Talk's* 1960 Issue. Of the roughly 13,000 Congolese in the country, Belgium mines employed nearly half of those people. Though the United States accounts for less than a percent of investment in the Congo, they relied on Belgium's ability to exploit minerals. However, U.S. added 45million dollars to the Belgium Congo economy—the most of any other customer.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, delegitimizing efforts continued in the fall of 1960 to ensure Lumumba would never return to political power. Even after the U.N. agreed to not influence the Congolese independence on the ground, they decided to neutralize Lumumba entirely. While the big three continued to use the media to delegitimize Lumumba, they subconsciously realized there was truth in *Life Magazine's* condemnation of chaotic independence. Connecting Lumumba's political identity to a virus was critical. Lumumba now carried the image similar to an organism that relied on a host to replicate. By now, the U.N. and Belgium were working against Lumumba. Proof that the U.N. ultimately caved into Belgium anti-Lumumba agenda came when the U.N. aided Kasa-Vubu in banning Lumumba from communicating via radio. The ultimate goal was to separate Lumumba from his followers and spread his political influence.

Through these actions, we can suggest that Lumumba continued to present a threat to the neo-colonial agenda. In the eyes of neo-colonial powers, delegitimization was not enough because of the fruitful product of Lumumba's fight to create a pro-independence political identity. As President Eisenhower stated, he did not want his political identity to be stained by a single man-let alone an African politician. In summary, this section has suggested a few examples of how Belgium, the U.S., and the U.N. attempted to use media outlets to delegitimize Lumumba's political identity. These examples matter because they demonstrate the complexity of Congo decolonization and also interrogate the mineral interests that motivated the anti-Lumumba narrative. It contests the notion that Congolese citizens were savage and had no control over their independence. Moreover, it sheds light on the way neo-colonial powers depicted Lumumba. It also touches on the shared responsibility of Lumumba and European powers to make independence successful. So, while Lumumba was far from a perfect man, neo-colonial attempts to delegitimize independence did not occur because of Lumumba's inexperience. The European and Western powers attempted to delegitimize Lumumba's dream of independence to continue exploiting the Congolese land and labor.

## CIA & Lumumba: Continuing battle of Political Identities

In late 1960, C.I.A. and Belgium-financed troops arrested Patrice Lumumba and tortured him for several excruciating hours. In January 1961, those troops took Lumumba to a Katanga forest – the same region that held the Congo's uranium mines. There, the troops assassinated Lumumba via a firing squad. Perhaps in the minds of many of those involved in murdering Lumumba, the disintegration of his extremities would be the end of his political legacy. Surprisingly, the neo-colonial attempt to delegitimize Lumumba through the media extended throughout Belgium, Congo, and the West after Lumumba's assassination. Why did this happen?

Was it similar to the delegitimization in section 1? Why does it matter? This section offers a few possible answers.

The U.N and U.S.'s first attempt to delegitimize Lumumba after his assassination was to prevent public knowledge from spreading through the Congo. The U.S. and U.N. knew that they could not allow their hands to become stained with guilt or negative backlash with the murder. As the era of independence turned the corner of Lumumba's death, the U.S. now had to find a way to "to conceal the American role."<sup>31</sup> The American delegitimization of Lumumba continued in a letter from the U.N. to Moise TSHOMBE concerning Lumumba's burial. Burial tradition or even respect for a person's remains posed a threat to the U.N. The U.N. knew they had to conceal their role in history and prevent Congolese people from memorializing Lumumba's resting place. One of these factors that needed to be protected was "the identity of the village" in which Belgium buried Lumumba. The U.N. worried that locals would continue Lumumba's political identity. Subsequently, this would possibly allow the flames of passion of the entire world to react against the U.N. Perhaps the U.N. realized that many people would react in favor of Lumumba, but they nonetheless desired to reduce the magnitude of their role. The significance of these sources suggests that the U.S. and U.N. feared local or international support of Lumumba's political identity. In a way, the fact that the U.N. worried that the same people Belgium branded uncivilized could damage their image speaks volumes to the unfounded claims Belgium presented in newspapers.

Furthermore, both the U.S. and U.N. continued to connect Lumumba's political identity once again through the media with degrading stereotypes. Soon after Lumumba's death, many people around the world protested the suspected assassination. However, the U.S knew they could not handle this pro-Lumumba reaction identically to branding Lumumba as a communist.

Even after Lumumba's assassination, the U.S. continued to use the media to push the narrative of violence and savageness on Lumumba's supporters. For instance, a 1961 Los Angeles Times newspaper continues to wrap the Congolese citizens with the idea that they are still not prepared for independence. Many of these traits The Times gave independence-pro people were "highly uneducated."<sup>32</sup> In a situation that brings the entire political identity full circle, the media continued to delegitimize the Congolese people who fought for independence. By reading between the lines, the Times was able to say that Lumumba's fight for independence changed nothing. In other words, before independence was identical to the independence era. Thus, Belgium / Western intervention would be the only way the Congo could prosper.

Even as the Senate Church Committee pushed former CIA officials to testify and shed light on U.S. involvement, it is important to realize the extent of colonial attempts to manipulate Congolese history. To understand the significance of these testimonies, we need to revisit Fighting Talk's perspective on Congolese history. In general, European powers held the Congo's history at the bottom of their shoe. In other words, European powers have dictated the way the world views Congo history. Fighting Talk explained that contemporary histories often credit Belgium as the discovery of the Congo.<sup>33</sup> More examples include Belgium's colonial missions to civilize or Leopold's ownership of the Congolese land. Leopold, perhaps, conducted the greatest attempt to manipulate colonial history by burning the Congo archives. In other words, the Congo's history was nothing without Europe. It is with this context that we may now proceed to understand the significance of language intertwined in the Senate Church Committee – the upcoming subject.

Specifically, by reading between the lines, CIA agent Allen Dulles attempted to delegitimize Lumumba's assassination through plausible deniability. While the Senate Church

Committee was the subject of many international topics, the Committee sought to uncover the C.I.A.'s involvement in the Congo. Dulles does not mention that he gave the order to assassinate Lumumba. Rather, Dulles explained that he was an extension of established orders.<sup>34</sup> Later in his testimony, even when he explained the approved method of Lumumba's assassination, he credits agent Schneider's deliverance of the poison. The testimony appears to be a game of "hot potato" in the sense that a single person is not shamed with the assassination. Even President Eisenhower, identified by Dulles, passed the decision to find a method to kill Lumumba to an unspecified group in the CIA. Two important factors should be taken into consideration when speaking on the cables. For one, the CIA would not specify who gave the direct authority to murder Lumumba because they did not want anyone to have a specific person/reason to attribute to the CIA's involvement. Second, the idea of 'passing' the responsibility of Lumumba's assassination distances the people involved with a sense of accountability.

However, U.S. attempts to delegitimize Lumumba's political identity included the censoring of their involvement in the Lumumba case. Congress had recorded the Church Committee testimonies in 1975. For years, however, the public had no knowledge of the actual transcripts and testimonies on paper. Now, the testimonies can be found in a 300 plus page that recounts the involvement of the CIA in the death of foreign leaders. One of the surprising factors explained by the committee is that President Gerald Ford attempted to ban these testimonies on two separate occasions. Though Lumumba was not the only foreign leader the CIA sought to assassinate; he was a principal target. This, of course, reiterates the notion that the U.S. attempted to delegitimize Lumumba after his death by occulting their own involvement. However, the evidence could be refuted by suggesting that the President and CIA / UN officials did not want to reveal truthful information on Lumumba's assassination because it could pose a

threat to national security. However, in his book *King Leopold's Ghost*, Adam Hochschild recounted a tremendous moment when sharing a drink with a former CIA agent in Belgium. At the moment, the former agent expressed pride in his involvement in murdering Lumumba. In his words, he felt the people in the United States would share his same pride. On a personal level, the men who assassinated Lumumba had no regrets. In the media and in Congress, they sought to distance themselves from these actions to further delegitimize Lumumba.

The neo-colonial attempts against Lumumba occurred not only against a single political identity. Of course, it could be reiterated that the U.S. did not want to jeopardize national security. However, the sources tell a different story. These attempts to obscure involvement in Lumumba's assassination forces the Congo into a block of history that the country has been subjected to for several years. Delegitimization developed in this way because European and Western countries have constantly attempted to erase critical evidence of exploitation – even before Lumumba became Prime Minister.

However, Lumumba continued to construct a political image for independence despite these neo-colonial attempts. To build on Lumumba's direct work written while he was imprisoned in 1958, we must understand what was the basis of Lumumba's letter. Lumumba knew that as independence might unfold, he would certainly die at some point. Whether he mentioned death or direct assassination was not clear. However, Lumumba sought to create a political identity that the world would embody by remembering the history of the Congolese people throughout the world. Lumumba knew firsthand how Belgium tried to delegitimize him and the Congo's colonial history. In a way, Lumumba recognized that for his political identity to survive, it would have to go beyond the knowledge of the Congolese people. This is not to say that Congolese people were incompetent in being independent without the involvement of other



countries. In fact, Congolese people supported a mutually respectful relationship that would help the Congo prosper.

Lumumba knew that the ultimate goal of his political identity was for people to place it into practice and remember it. In doing this, Lumumba knew he had to create a basis that would connect with many people – not only those who have lived in the Congo. Lumumba's political identity made it to the U.S. in many ways aside from U.N. protests. People like Malcolm X shared the basic goals Lumumba stood for. In a 1965 speech, Malcolm X informs a crowd that they should remember what Lumumba stood for. The what, as Malcom X explained, would be the resilience to oppose an oppressive government that tainted the fight for independence while hiding their involvement of exploitation and murder.<sup>35</sup> By shedding light on Lumumba's goal for independence and Belgium's attempt to delegitimize him, we can understand that the voices of those who fight for justice have the power to outlast the voices of greed. They demonstrate that the only thing to do when a government prioritizes economic gain over the well-being of its people – the real power remains with the people.

## Conclusion

### Why It Matters

This paper has argued that during the era of Congolese decolonization, Belgium used the media to delegitimize Patrice Lumumba's political identity for independence from 1956-1965. Despite this, pro-independence supporters like Lumumba were able to construct a political identity through the media that refused to die with Lumumba himself. This evidence, however, is only one way to approach this topic. One could easily concentrate on Pan-Africanist attempts to combat delegitimization. However, this paper has successfully contributed to the rich

scholarship on Lumumba by interrogating sources that deal with Belgium's delegitimization of Lumumba. The paper was modeled after thematic approach used to write the historiography – starting with Belgium Congo and then branching into U.N. and U.S. while remaining its focus on Lumumba.

However, even with the fruitful evidence uncovered in media and various archives, why does this matter? A principal goal of this essay was to find overlaps between African and U.S. history. The history of the United States is well known in America and studied in secondary school to a great extent. However, educators often struggle or might not know how to implement African history with American events. By intersecting the involvement of the U.N. and C.I.A in the Lumumba case, this paper offers future scholarly discourse that considers world history as an interconnected web.

In a more basic concept, this paper allows the scholarly and non-academic world to understand that history often follows certain patterns. Colonial powers have scrutinized the Congo's history in textbooks, speeches and through the deliberate incineration of archives. The paper demonstrated that often times, men in power feel threatened by those who oppose their political agendas. Lumumba was never a perfect politician, but he believed in freedom and independence. As an audience, we don't need to have a PhD in history to understand that fighting for people's rights and freedoms is the right thing to do. Though neo-colonial powers succeeded in assassinating Lumumba, they were never able to completely erase his political identity from history. The Patrice Lumumba case allows us to understand that even when governments fight to erase history, re-visiting histories like this one prevent the voices who fought against the colonial government to be silenced. This paper does just that.

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