"Batetela", "Baluba", "Basonge": Ethnogenesis in Zaire.

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Résumé


Les étiquettes ethniques Luba, Songye et Tetela existaient toutes au xixe siècle, et cependant aucune n’avait la signification qu’elle revêt aujourd’hui. Les Européens ont joué un rôle déterminant dans la définition et la redéfinition de ces groupes ethniques en créant et en transformant les stéréotypes de chaque groupe qualifiant certains d’intelligents ou de réceptifs au changement.

Les phénomènes d’ethnogénèse relatifs aux Lulua, aux Luba-Kasai, aux Tetela et aux Songye révèlent la non-pertinence non seulement du primordialisme mais également de la vision instrumentale comme cadres généraux d’explication des phénomènes ethniques. La manipulation par les élites des symboles ethniques peut effectivement être observée mais elle a également produit des effets inintentionnels. De même, la vision instrumentale ne rend pas compte des phénomènes d’interaction entre Belges et Africains ou entre chefs et dépendants.

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Many Zairians (and some foreigners who have lived in Zaire or who study that country's history and politics) “know” that in the late nineteenth century the Batetela came under the influence of Arab slave-raiders from East Africa. Many of these Batetela, under the leadership of Gongo Lutete (also known as Ngongo Leteta) raided for slaves among the Baluba of Kasai province. The Batetela not only were warlike, they were cannibals.

Defeated by forces of the Congo Free State, Gongo deserted the Arab cause, setting off a large-scale war, the so-called “Arab Campaign.” He was executed by the Europeans because they suspected him of treason, or because they no longer needed his services. Gongo’s Batetela followers helped the Europeans to defeat the Arabs and helped to conquer their fellow Batetela of northern Sankuru (northeastern Kasai). However, they also staged two revolts that threatened the survival of the Free State and were put down only after years of effort (François 1949, Cornet 1955).

This synthesis, only mildly caricatured, could be supported by many more references than supplied here. But while the “Batetela” story is a good story, it is little more than that. Some of the key points are flatly wrong and others require qualification. Specifically, the ethnic identity of Gongo and of his people needs to be established.

I shall demonstrate that the ethnic categories of south-central Zaire are recent, and that the ethnic labels shifted from one referent to another before taking on their present meanings. Ethnic stereotypes also floated. Specifically, three major ethnic labels have changed drastically:

1) The Baluba category has been narrowed considerably so as to exclude entire ethnic groups (e.g. Songye, Lulua).

2) The label Batetela has shifted so that some of the original population is no longer covered, and the category has broadened greatly (especially at the expense of the label Nkucu).

3) The label Basonge (Basongye) has broadened considerably and now covers all Songye-speakers including some once called Batetela.
Ethnonationalism, Primordial, Instrumental or Processual?

Recently, the debate between those who see ethnonationalism as "primordial" and those who associate it with modernity has been dominated by the latter. As Brass (1991: 1) puts it, ethnicity and nationalism are not "givens". They are, first, "creations of elites who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent, in order to protect their well-being or existence, or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups and for themselves". Second, they are modern phenomena, inseparably connected with the activities of the modern centralizing state.

However, Newbury's objection (1988: 14-15) is pertinent. She defends the "processual approach" and criticizes "instrumental" approaches (such as that of Brass) for their failure to "examine, empirically and at the local level, the role that rural populations have played in these dynamic, essentially dialectic processes of ethnic identity formation and political activity".

Since the publication of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) many historians of science have assumed that major theoretical shifts arise from the recognition of anomalies—observed facts that a current theory did not expect and cannot explain—and the concerted attempt to devise a better theory that could explain them. Recently, however, Lightman and Gingerich (1992: 694) have argued that scientists often discount or ignore experimental observations when they contradict prevailing theories. When new theories are developed—for reasons unrelated to the unrecognized anomalies—and they provide a compelling explanation of previously unexplained facts, "it is 'safe' to recognize them for what they are", namely anomalies. In other words, "anomalies" are recognized only under the new theory, when they are no longer anomalies.

Social science is of course notoriously mushy, and does not possess theories as well-defined as evolution or plate tectonics (two examples discussed by Lightman and Gingerich). But there has been a paradigm shift, as regards the understanding of ethnic politics, and anomalies have been dealt with in a manner which supports the generalizations of the two historians of science.

When Congo/Zaire made its abrupt transition to independence, political competition was expressed to a great extent in ethnic terms. At almost the same time, the current understanding of ethnicity as fluid and situational emerged. This was not merely a coincidence. The writings of the political scientist Crawford Young (1965) and of the historian Jan Vansina (1965) (among others) contributed to the establishment of the current consensus. However, the fact that the new paradigm was just emerging, and that the paradigmatic shift had *not* been occasioned by systematic examination of anomalies, meant that analysis in terms of the new
paradigm was incomplete and inconsistent. For example, Young (1965: 249) compared the crucial role of Europeans “in catalyzing the awareness of Mongo unity [. . .] to that of Van Wing among the Bakongo”. However, not until The Politics of Cultural Pluralism (1975) did he acknowledge, citing MacGaffey (1970), that the version of Kongo history held by politicians of the Kongo party ABAKO represented adoption of the monarchical version synthesized and promoted by Father Joseph Van Wing (1959) and other missionaries.

The Concept of Ethnogenesis as Applied to the Luba-Kasai

The state of the art in 1960, in understanding ethnicity and ethnogenesis in the Belgian Congo, is illustrated by a small volume written by young anthropologists Daniel Biebuyck (Lovanium University) and Mary Douglas (University of London) (1961). The authors explained (ibid.: 7) that they were responding to the need for “a convenient ethnographic guide to the tribes of the Congo”:

“Whereas everyone knows of the one or two which have filled the news, the remaining 200 or so are just names, difficult to place, still more to class as to their likely allegiances. It is not too difficult to produce a map of tribal distributions, but to make a simple statement of the relations of the main groups is a daunting task”.

Unlike the situation in some other new African states, where “one or two large tribes threaten to dominate the rest [. . .], no one tribe or combination dwarfs the other, but this does happen on a smaller scale in some localities.”

Biebuyck and Douglas asserted (validly, in my view) that major differences in life-style, as typified by opposition between Masai pastoralists and Kikuyu cultivators in Kenya, did not seem to lie behind “tribal” conflict in the Congo. Indeed, it was within the big language groups that the most intense conflicts took place (ibid.: 10, 17). They noted that the “Ba-Kongo” in the southwest, the “Ba-Lunda” in the southeast, as well as the “Ba-Luba” had caused the most controversy, the first two by threatening to secede. I detect ambivalence as to why these three groupings had attracted so much attention. It was not mere size: “They all three have traditions of political domination and past unity, and all three have benefited significantly more than their neighbours from the economic development of the last sixty years. The last is probably the most important factor” (ibid.: 10).

Did the co-authors disagree as to the relative importance of the traditions as compared to differential modernization? In any case, it is clear that Biebuyck and Douglas were unable to come to terms with the “Ba-Luba” phenomenon, perhaps not understanding that Luba-Kasai and
Luba-Shaba spoke different (though related) languages and had very different relations to the historic Luba state in Katanga/Shaba.

They also had difficulty sorting out the effects of the “Arab” slave trading and raiding of the late nineteenth century and the Belgian “Arab Campaign”. For example, they assert: “Tribes which fought on the Arab side retained a tradition of hostility to Belgian rule”, referring the reader, by a footnote, to a later discussion of the Tetela. Concerning the Luba, they argue that “…in the 1880s many of their chiefs moved westwards, while other chiefdoms were totally destroyed. The current antagonism between Ba-Luba and Ba-Tetela, which they tend to attribute to Ba-Tetela resentment of earlier Ba-Luba rule, probably gets some of its edge from Ba-Tetela retaliation when they were in the service of the Arabs at the end of the century” (ibid.: 15, 22).

In summary, while they recognized that recent economic changes probably mattered as much if not more than traditions, the two young authors were at something of a loss to explain what motivated the extraordinary degree of ethnic division in Congolese politics during the period of decolonization. This confusion was general as of 1960-61, which meant that the first generation of foreign political scientists going out to prepare “country studies” on the decolonization process would have to develop theory as well as collate facts. I turn next to two of the most prominent and successful of those political scientists, René Lemarchand and Crawford Young.

I shall begin by criticizing the presentation of Luba-Kasai ethnogenesis in Lemarchand’s Political Awakening in the Congo (1964). Next I will examine the treatment of the Luba by Young (1965), more satisfactory than that of Lemarchand but still incomplete or equivocal on several key points. Third, I will examine the discussion of Luba ethnogenesis by Mukendi (1985) and Roosens (1989), which makes several interesting points but does not progress significantly beyond Young. Fourth shall pass in review the Jewsiewicki contribution to Vail (1989), a truly original interpretation which, however, lacks key evidence in this version. After a summary of my view of Luba ethnogenesis, the remainder of the paper will deal with ethnogenesis among two neighbors of the Luba, the Songye and the Tetela.

Lemarchand’s stance on ethnonationalism was inconsistent but predominantly primordialist. He recognized “artificial ethnicity” and indeed asserted that “…in no other territory is there so great a proliferation of artificially—one might say ‘semantically’—created ethnic groups as in the Congo”. The labels “Bangala”, “Lulua” and “Kasaians” covered artificial ethnic groups which had been promoted in part by administrative use of these labels (Lemarchand 1964: 99-100). However there is no suggestion that there was anything artificial about the Kongo, Yaka, Lunda, Yeke, Tabwa, Lega, Zande or Mongo ethnic groups (all discussed). Nor did Lemarchand suggest anything of the sort for the Luba-Kasai. After
mentioning the efforts of Justin Bomboko “to restore the unity of the
‘Mongo Kingdom’” and the efforts of Sylvain Mangole a.k.a. Kalamba “to
create a Lulua kingdom”. Lemarchand asserted that “these attempts,
though dictated by opportunism, were largely inspired by the traditional
political folklore of African societies” (ibid.: 19). He concluded the pre-
liminary section of his book by stressing “that during the centuries that
preceded the colonial period certain groups developed a cultural identity
of their own, and that such an identity is still the most enduring and most
cohesive basis for the organization of political groups in the Congo”
(ibid.: 24). That is primordialism in a nutshell.

Using an unsatisfactory conceptual framework, i.e. the “culture clus-
ter” as defined by Merriam,1 Lemarchand introduced “the Baluba peo-
ple”, who “form one of the largest cultural aggregations of the
Congo”. He tells us that “oral traditions report that the first Baluba
‘empire’ was founded in the fourteenth or fifteenth century by a Basonge
chief named Nkongolo Mukulu” (ibid.: 12). At its height this state sup-
posedly extended from Lake Tanganyika in the east to the Bushimaye
River, and from southern Katanga to Maniema, but starting “...in the
seventeenth century [...], partly as a result of successional disputes
among the sons of Nkongolo, a number of Baluba subgroups—Bena
Kanioka, Bena Konji, Bakwa Kalondji, Bakwa Dishi, and others—
migrated in successive waves toward the Kasai. Some of these, like the
Bena Lulua, settled in the northern part of the province, and others in the
southern region, near Bakwanga”.2 Lemarchand presents these state-
ments without interpretation and does not mention that the Kanyok and
Luntu deny membership in the Luba-Kasai ethnic group as of course do
the Lulua, whereas the Bakwa Kalondji are one of the most important
subgroups accepting the Luba-Kasai label.

After summarizing the conventional history of the second Luba
empire, Lemarchand argued that: “While the political organization of the
Baluba is normally based on the extended family or the village groups, at
times they shared a consciousness of belonging to a wider political unit.
But such consciousness, even when it did exist, was never strong enough
to hold them together over a long period of time” (ibid.). Although the
Luba people were socially heterogeneous (some patrilineal, others matri-
lineal), the “main countervailing influence to this variegated socio-politi-
cal structure lies in the sense of cultural unity which permeates the
attitude of the Baluba” (ibid.). All this is presented without any notion
that consciousness can change nor any regard for the limitations of
his sources, notably the Belgian synthesizer of administratively induced

1. Merriam 1959: 375. It is unsatisfactory because ethnic consciousness—which is
situational and changeable—is used to define clusters.
2. Lemarchand 1964: 12. The Luba state never included the peoples of Lake Tan-
oral tradition Verhulpen3 and the Luba-Kasai intellectual Mabika-Kalanda (ibid.: 11), the latter committed to the lost cause of Luba-Lulua unity.

As for the impact of the precolonial environment upon political parties, Lemarchand (ibid.: 22) asserted that: “In parties that were organized and led by individuals who claimed a position of prestige and authority in the traditional order, much of the impetus came from the leaders’ ability to identify themselves with the ancestral values of their societies”. His example is the ethnic association Lulua-Frères, the success of which was due in part to the prestige of Chief Kalamba:

“... as grandson of the famous Kalamba Mukenge, paramount chief of the Luluas. Kalamba resuscitated the vision of an imaginary kingdom and thus greatly enhanced the party’s appeal. [...] and in August of that year [1955] Kalamba reportedly declared ‘before an immense crowd’ that ‘all the chiefs and their subjects seem to remember the distant past and recognize what they had almost forgotten... If this could happen, you must recall that it is thanks to the Lulua-Freres association, whose members have gone through all kinds of trouble [...] to inculcate this idea in the hearts of their people’” (ibid.).

Kalamba seems to have understood better than Lemarchand that memories can be “inculcated”. Lemarchand seems unsure of the sort of phenomenon Lulua-Freres was, as is indicated by the tension in terminology between “ancestral values” and “imaginary kingdom”. Does he fully understand that the first Kalamba served the European explorers Pogge and Wissmann, that he became “paramount chief” thanks to his association with them, and that Kalamba’s embryonic state was indicated on early maps as the Royaume de l’amitié? Lemarchand’s account of Lulua ethnogenesis—separation from the general category of Luba—greatly understates the European role.

Under chapter 5. “The Impact of Western Economic Forces”, Lemarchand contrasted the Kuba—“averse to innovation” and “static”—to the Luba-Kasai who supposedly “responded much more enthusiastically to the impact of urbanization”: “Beginning in 1909, with the foundation of the Catholic mission of Mikalayi, near Luluabourg, they gradually drifted from the Bakwanga region to the other urban centers of the province. From 1912 to 1931 their territorial expansion was accelerated by the demand for labor created by the construction of the Chemin de Fer du Bas-Congo au Katanga (BCK) [...] In postwar years Baluba elements moved in increasing numbers into the major urban centers of Kasai and Katanga provinces, and by 1954 accounted for about 57 per cent of the cité indigène of Luluabourg and 35 per cent of the centre extra-coutumier of Elisabethville [...] Furthermore, by taking full advantage of the educational opportunities offered by

Catholic mission schools, they managed to obtain most of the jobs available. As a result, while expanding territorially, they aroused a considerable amount of anti-Baluba feeling among the indigenous tribes. This resentment against the growing threat of Baluba domination lay at the root of the tribal rivalries that envenomed the political scene of the Kasai” (ibid.: 97).

This is a fair description of Luba response to colonial rule but no clear explanation is offered as to why the Luba showed such enthusiasm. It might be that the shortage of land in South Kasai encouraged their attitude: “But it is equally plausible to ascribe these predispositions to historical and cultural factors. Their long subservience during the precolonial period to the neighboring Bakuba, and the democratic character of their traditional political institutions, both helped to alleviate the weight of primordial structures”.

I have no idea what he meant by subservience to the Kuba, by democratic character, or by the weight of primordial structures.

Young on the Luba

Young was more clearly an anti-primordialist. Like Lemarchand, he calls the “Bangala” an example of “artificial ethnicity” but appears to mean only there was no empirical referent in rural Congo/Zaire for this identity, which however did exist in the army and in the towns. Some of Lemarchand’s other cases of “artificial ethnicity” are presented by Young (1965) as “supertribalism”, i.e. the process by which “the innumerable groupings of the countryside” are reduced to three or four urban ethnic reference groups. An early example occurred in eastern Kasai where:

“... much of the population was dislocated and disorganized as a result of the Arab incursions and the subsequent campaigns against them. At a very early date, an uprooted class, no doubt including many Baluba but also many others, took refuge around the European posts. Visiting Lusambo, Kasai, in 1908, Hilton-Simpson, a member of the famous Torday-Joyce anthropological expedition, reported an ‘enormous’ African population. A number of separate ethnic villages were grouped around the post; however, in addition to these, there is a very large mixed population of natives belonging to no particular village, who are generally termed Baluba by the white men of the Kasai, but who in reality belong to that tribe no more than to any other. These included the former Arab slaves, the uprooted, the outcasts, many of whom had no idea from what village they came. This group no doubt successfully became ‘Baluba’”.6

5. Lemarchand 1964: 98. He retained his primordialist orientation; and in a 1972 article he discussed the relationship between clientelism and ethnicity, “whether taken to refer to the ‘givens’ or assumed givens of social existence” (1972: 83).
6. Young 1965: 241-242. However, if one is interested in ethnic stereotyping then Young has omitted the main point made by Hilton-Simpson (1969: 72-73), who called these Baluba “undesirable aliens [whose] existence is a curse to the Kasai district [...]. They were, mentally, far below the average free man of a primitive tribe. These unfortunates have settled in places like Lusambo and Luebo, and have there produced children of a type as debased as themselves”.
There are two important ideas here. Hilton-Simpson seeing the label “Luba” as assigned by whites and Young adding the idea that people “became” Luba.

Like Lemarchand, Young contrasted the “unsuccessful” response of the Kuba to modernity to the “successful” response of the Luba-Kasai. He was ambivalent as to the reasons for the latter, arguing that social dislocation at the time the Europeans arrived was a factor but mentioning (like Lemarchand) the possibility that “the social mobility possible within traditional Baluba structures, as with the Ibo in Nigeria, had instilled in them a sense of drive for promotion even within customary society” (ibid.: 259). This is unconvincing since his sources, Verbeken and Verhulpen, deal not only with the Luba-Kasai but also with the Songye, less “successful” modernizers. Neither Young nor Lemarchand attempts to compare Luba values to those of the Lulua.

Roosens and Mukendi on the Luba

As the titles of their works indicate, the Roosens and Vail volumes were written in an era when ethnogenesis was the prevailing paradigm. Roosens (1989: 14-15) summarizes four cases of ethnic group behavior from around the world—Huron “Indians” of Canada, Aymara “Indians” of Bolivia, recent immigrants to Belgium, and the Luba, and defends an instrumentalist view of ethnic groups as “pressure groups with a noble face”. His chapter 8, “The Luba of Kasai (Zaire): New ‘White’ Ethnics”, consists of a summary of Mukendi’s doctoral dissertation, entitled L’ethnogénèse luba (1985), and comments thereon by Roosens. It offers interesting insight into the Luba and Lulua (Luluwa), described as “an extreme case: they became ethnic groups only in the 1950s, following a strong development in the direction of modernizing Western culture”. In other words, groups were not ethnic groups until they had formed organizations to defend their interests.

Much of Mukendi’s thesis reproduces the same heavily synthesized oral traditions on which Lemarchand relied. The originality comes in the discussion of the colonial era. Like Lemarchand and Young, Roosens and Mukendi contrast the attitude of the Luba toward educational and employment opportunities to that of the Kuba (of course!) and the Lulua. Gradually, the Luba came to form “a socioeconomic class that was closest to the whites [...]; there were many évolutés, people who were capable of living like white people, who frequently owned their own homes and lived in the better ‘native’ neighborhoods. In the cities, the Luba distinguished themselves from most of the other native groups by their education and lifestyle as well as by their phenotype, at least according to the popular view, for the Luba have a strikingly lighter skin color
than most other Zairois”.7 The phenotype business is silly—Luba like other Zairois come in various shades—but is intriguing as an aspect of ethnic self-conception.

Mukendi conducted research on stereotypes in 1982, and found that both Luba and other Zairians tended to attribute the same positive and negative stereotypes to the Luba—intelligent, hard-working, haughty, tribalistic. As summarized by Roosens (1989: 22):

“The subjects of Mukendi’s study, taken from different ethnic groups, appeared to use a kind of ethnic scale: on one end were the Luba, who approach the whites by their intelligence, their education, and their working ability; on the other side are the Tetela, about whom it is said that they practiced cannibalism until recently, a practice considered as belonging to the primitive past. According to Mukendi, it is clear that the young Zaïrois students who participated in his study apply an evolutionary perspective as a matter of course; primitives are at the bottom and the ‘evolved’ and westernized are at the top”.

Several remarks are in order. First, the stereotype of the Luba held to some extent by themselves, certainly by others, has been “Jews of the Congo” more so than “whites of the Congo”.8 Second, even “whites of the Congo” is much more ambivalent than either Mukendi or Roosens seems to realize. When Zairois say that one of their number is white or like a white man, they imply selfishness. Being “close to the whites” was an epithet hurled at the “moderate”, i.e. pro-Belgian political party of 1960, the Parti national du progrès. Third, the Tetela (like the Lulua) are not some group which refused modernization, rather they are just behind the Luba. Fourth (and Roosens misses the boat on this, identifying only the Cokwe as having raided the Luba in the late nineteenth century), Luba blame Tetela for the raids coming from the East. Most Tetela were not involved in the raids and many of those involved were not Tetela, but “the Tetela” are blamed.

Jewsiewicki on the Luba

In the Vail book, Jewsiewicki (1989) advances an interpretation of Luba ethnogenesis that differs sharply from that of Lemarchand (although the break with Young’s interpretation is less drastic). He describes the future Luba-Kasai as “a vast and rather heterogeneous group of agricultural peoples dwelling in the Kasai Basin of Central Africa [who] had come under pressure from neighboring predatory groups [. . . , and] came to rely

8. MUKENDI (1985: 130) mentions “Jews of the Congo” but deals with this label inadequately: “Nous savons qu’en 1950 il y avait dans les dix villes principales du Congo plus de 100,000 Luba (Young 1965, p. 128). C’est pour cela que les Luba furent appelés les Juifs du Congo”.

on the protection of various new colonial institutions such as missions, business enterprises and the embryonic colonial state” (ibid.: 327-328). Where Jewsiewicki goes beyond earlier authors is in his interpretation of the consequences of the uprooting and regrouping of these people. Heavy investment in industrial capital and regionalization of the colonial administration met “two objective conditions for a specifically ethnic integration” of the Luba:

“But the question remained as to whether the necessary subjective conditions were already present in the people’s collective consciousness. In fact, the shock of the period between the 1880s and the 1920s had prepared them for their collective socialization as a wage-earning group and for the reception of a unique common ethnic culture to replace the pluralism and heterogeneous village culture of former times. The missions had begun the training of an indigenous (local and later national) elite whose socio-political fortunes became tied to the advancement of a posited homogeneous culture” (ibid.).

Unlike his predecessors, Jewsiewicki stresses the synthesizing of Luba language and culture in a cooperative effort by Belgians and Luba.9

Administrative reorganization contributed directly to ethnogenesis. In 1933, the Kasai Province was created by adding the Lomami District of Katanga to the Kasai and Sankuru Districts of the former Congo-Kasai Province, thereby dividing the Luba-Kasai between the areas in which they produced food for industrial workers (i.e. in Kasai) and the place of their employment in industry (Katanga):

“An administrative framework was thus created for Luba emigration and the underdevelopment of the Kasai. The emphasis placed on indigenization as a guiding administrative and political principle, combined with the destruction of provincial political autonomy, drove the white colonial world to seek a new basis for provincial specificity. The cultural identity represented by the use of a specific local language meant that the Kasai was to be set apart by the prevailing use of Luba and the Katanga by the use of Swahili” (ibid.: 329-330).

“Thus regionalism occurred as a nascent political force prior to 1930”. Jewsiewicki writes (does he mean, in the 1930s?), even though it manifested itself most prominently in 1959-60 as Katanga separatism.

“This distinction suggests that regionalism is a form of political articulation of collective identity in societies where national integration in the form of the complete mobility of the workforce and of capital is only a gradually realized event. Ethnic identification and awareness would then be a type of political framework belonging to societies where wage-remunerated migrant labor and the means of production are dominant. It would, in this view, be a form of white political management, but it would be a form of African internal control over the city-country.

9. This otherwise excellent analysis is marred by an inexplicable error: Jewsiewicki has Father Tempels basing *La philosophie bantoue* (1945) on work with Luba-Kasai when it clearly was based on work among the Luba-Shaba.
space for as long as the social autonomy of the cities and the capitalization of agriculture had yet to be accomplished" (ibid.).

The only opportunities for socio-economic advancement open to the Africans were in trade and in "the industrial wage-earning class-in-the-making". Resettling outside their homeland but in areas where the Luba language was useful, the Luba progressively became "the 'cultural brokers' (intermédiaires culturels) par excellence, first in the Kasai, then in the south, and then even in the centre of the country, with the exception of the Lower Congo area. And, as they did so, they became internally derived 'strangers' in the country" (ibid.). In other words, they became the "Jews of the Congo".

The Luba case, as presented by Jewsiewicki, supports the processual or dialectical interpretation of ethnic self-assertion as espoused by Newbury (1988). Luba non-elites followed the elites because it was advantageous to do so.

What happened was this. At the time of European penetration of Central Africa, the label "Luba" referred generally to the famous Luba state in Shaba (or Katanga). People as far away as the Lulua of Kasai, the Lunda of southwestern Shaba, the Tetela-speaking "Aluba" of southern Maniema, and the Bemba of northern Zambia claimed that they or their chiefs had come from the Luba state. As Young (1965: 259) notes, the explorers Livingstone, Cameron and Wissman all were favorably impressed by the "Luba", i.e. they thought them more intelligent than other Africans and more likely to be successfully converted to Christianity and other European ways. Livingstone seems to have been referring to Luba of what became Katanga, while Wissman was referring to the people now known as Lulua. It is also true, as Young points out, that the favorable stereotype once launched influenced other Europeans who applied it to other groups and notably the people who became "Luba-Kasai". Subsequently, in interaction with Europeans and particularly agents of the state who had the authoritative ability to decide who should bear this or that label and be administratively separated or united, a simplification of the ethnic map took place. Various Kasai groups said to the Belgians, in effect, we are not Luba if by Luba you mean those people.

10 However, there are some gaps in the analysis: a) how diverse were the precolonial cultures of the peoples who became Luba-Kasai? b) How different were these cultures from those of groups which could have become or remained Luba but did not, e.g. Lulua, Kanyok, Luntu, Kete? c) How different were the cultures of both categories (proto-Luba, failed Luba) from the synthetic Luba-Kasai culture produced by the Belgian-Luba collaboration sketched by Jewsiewicki? There is a parallel set of questions regarding the Luba-Kasai language (Tshiluba) and the various dialects.
Migrating Ethnonyms: The Tétela

Now I shall attempt to apply insights derived from Luba ethnogenesis to a more complex case, that of the Tétela. In the period for which written records can be checked against oral testimony (the 1870s onward) the peoples of south central Zaire have remained relatively fixed in place but their ethnonyms have moved about. In recounting this process as it applies to the Tétela and their neighbors I rely heavily on a few accounts by European and African visitors. My reason for confidence in these testimonies is simple: ethnic labels were not ideologized at that point and the various witnesses reported what they believed to be true.11

We shall discuss two labels which apply to the Tétela and their neighbors, i.e. Nkucu/Kusu and Tétela. We also shall have to deal with the labels Luba and Songye, because, as I shall demonstrate, the process of defining the groups to which the Tétela label would apply was connected to the processes by which the labels Songye and Luba took on their present meaning.

Livingstone visited the Afro-Arab trading center of Nyangwe on the Lualaba river in 1871 and wrote of seeing slaves from “Kuss” country there (1875: 372-374). Cameron visited Nyangwe but, in describing the experience, he employs no ethnic labels which shed light on our problem. However, he tells of visiting a chief, “King Kasongo”, near the camp of Tippo Tip. Close by was a place called Totera or Utotera to which came traders from Sankorra (i.e. Sankuru), which Cameron took to be a lake (1969: 270-279).

In 1876, the journalist-turned-explorer Stanley passed through the area and reported having been furnished by Tippo Tip with some “Kusu” cannibals to serve as interpreters. At Nyangwe one could buy everything “from an ordinary earthenware pot to a fine handsome girl from Samba, Marera or Ukusu” (Stanley 1878: 129). He referred to slaves of “Barua, Manyema, Bakusu, Ba-Samba and Utotera” origin. It is clear from Stanley’s testimony that the labels Luba (“Barua”), Samba (“Ba-Samba”), Malela (“Marera”), Manyema, Kusu (“Bakusu”, “Ukusu”), and Tétela (“Utotera”) all existed in the 1870s, but they seem to stand for different peoples and places: “Ukusu” and “Utotera” are not the same region.

Tippo Tip and the “Watetera”

Tippo Tip’s account of his activities and observations in eastern Zaire (1974) is the most important source on ethnic identities in the late nineteenth century but it is not easy to understand. There are a number of

11. In contrast, slavery and cannibalism were ideologized and one must exercise caution in interpreting reports dealing with them.
dubious interpretations in Bontinck’s French translation in the sections dealing with the Tetela-Songye-Luba region. In particular, we must examine the problem of the ethnic identity of the “Watetera” or people of “Utetera”, the country in which Tippo Tip took over as chief and which served as the nucleus of the commercial kingdom he built up in eastern Zaire.

Bontinck interprets the label “Watetera” as the Swahili equivalent of “Batetela” or “Tetela” and seems to regard the meaning as identical. In my view, however, one must take into account changes in the meaning and the extension of the term “Tetela” which have taken place since Tippo Tip’s experiences and even since the writing of his autobiography.

The story of Tippo Tip’s encounter with the “Watetera” begins in 1869-70. Having spent a year in the Kayumbe chiefdom (among the Luba of Katanga), the Afro-Arab trader traveled north through the country lying between the Lualaba and the Lomami. Somewhere in this area he met a man “qui parlait parfaitement le Kirua”, i.e. Luba-Katanga. Learning that Tippo Tip was looking for ivory, the man supposedly told him:


For Bontinck there is no doubt that “Utetera” is “the country of the Batetela” and that “Kasongo Rushie” (Cameron’s King Kasongo, whom Bontinck calls “Kasongo Lushi”) was the king or paramount chief of the Batetela. If “Utetera” equals “country of the Tetela”,12 is it self-evident that the word “Tetela” designates the people now known as Tetela? I believe that it designates a subgroup of the people now known as Songye.

Consider first the name of the chief. The name “Kasongo” is widespread among Tetela, Songye and Luba and thus does not constitute a clue as to the ethnic identity of this Kasongo. But if one considered it to be a title, one would think above all of the Luba monarchy in Shaba. Bontinck sometimes writes le Kasongo Lushi, indicating that he considers it to be a title. I believe, therefore, that this chief, whether Tetela or Songye in origin, had been under Luba domination at one time. “Lushi” or “Lushie” in contrast seems to be an anthroponym or personal name, but it is not a well-known name among Tetela. Lushi means “river” in that language; should one translate the name or title as “The Kasongo of the River”? However, Tippo Tip wrote Kasongo Rushie, and Du Fief’s map13

12. The prefix U does signify “country of” in Swahili, and the Swahili “r” is the equivalent of “l” in many Zairian languages.
shows a village “Kasongo Luchia”, in the Imbaddi region. Bontinek does not justify shortening this to “Lushi”. “Mwana Mapunga” indeed means “child of Mapunga” but here again one wonders about the ethnic identity of the chief in question, since mwana exists in Kisongye (and many other Bantu languages) while in Otetela one would say ona. Finally, “Mapunga” seems to be a proper name but it is not a well-known one among the Tetela.

The man Tippo Tip met along the road continues to speak:

“Mais le Chef Kasongo Rushie est très vieux; il avait deux sœurs qui s’appelaient, l’une Kina Daramumba et l’autre Kitoto. Nous avons entendu des vieillards de chez nous qu’il y a très longtemps le grand chef d’Urua [the Luba state] était Kumambe, nommé après Rungu Kabare [Ilunga Kabale]; il était puissant et régnait sur tout l’Urua, jusqu’à Mtowa. Tout le pays du Manyema et le long de la rivière Rumami, il le conquit et le soumit à son pouvoir; il arriva même dans l’Ute-tera, où il captura ces femmes Kina Daramumba et Kitoto du clan de Mwana Mapunga”.

The ethnic identity of these women is important since they are relatives of Kasongo. I agree with Bontinek that “dans le nom Kina Daramumba, Kina est sans doute un anthroponyme, tandis que Daramumba se réfère à une dignité particulière” (Tippo Tip 1974: 233 fn 244). Kina might be a distortion of Akina, a woman’s name among the Tetela. As for “Daramumba” Bontinek cites Samain, according to whom: “Chez les Basonge, on trouve aussi des cheffesses... Un frère chef prend quelques gens et les donne, par ex. à sa soeur, mais c’est proprement le frère qui reste chef. Les femmes cheffesses sont supérieures aux autres femmes. On les appelle Bandelamumba...” (Samain 1924: 52).

But if Kasongo’s sister Kina had been promoted to the rank of Mandalamumba, doesn’t that tend to confirm that Kina as well as Kasongo was a Songye? Bontinek cites no source as to the existence of the bundalamumba institution among the Tetela.

The second woman was called Kitoto. According to Bontinek (Tippo Tip 1974: 233 fn 245): “Le nom Kitoto, comme celui de Lulendu et Nduwa, était réservé, chez les Batetela du Lemani, aux femmes nobles et respectables”. Bontinek does not explain how a Tetela chief could have two sisters, one Tetela but the other Songye. Does the name Kitoto exist among the Songye? Bontinek does not tell us.

Still according to “the man who spoke Kirua perfectly” (ibid.: 87), two routes led to Utetera:

“...une qui mène à Nsara, dont le chef est appelé Mwinyi Nsara, ce dernier terme étant le nom même de la région; par cette piste vous arriverez chez Kasongo Rushie, allié des Nsara; l’autre piste conduit à Mkahuja, dont les gens sont en dispute avec Kasongo Rushie et voudraient lui faire la guerre. Les Nsara, les Nguo, les Kibumbe, les Iziwa, les Mkutwa et les Msangwe, en tout plus d’une vingtaine de grands chefs et encore un nombre plus important de petits chefs, tous désirent attaquer Utetera. Mais les Watetera sont très nombreux; seulement ils manquent
qu'emploi intelligent; de leur côté, ceux qui voudraient les attaquer, les craignent trop, car chaque fois qu'ils les ont attaqués, ils furent défait, à cause de cette peur" (ibid.).

I agree that the Nsara, Mkahuja, Nguo, Iziwa and Msangwe probably are the Bena Sala, Bena Kahua, Bena Nguo, Bena Majiba et Bena Sangwa, five Songye subgroups, but see no obvious link between "Mkatwa" and "Ma-Kapua or Bena Kapua". A few years later ivory became scarce in the region where Tippo Tip was and he decided to go to Utetera. However the chief of the Bena Kahua said he could not go to Utetera but only to Kirembwe. A few gifts changed the chief's mind but then the people of Kirembwe itself arrived to insist that he visit them: "Vous devez aller chez Kirembwe; vous n'irez pas dans l'Utetera. Ces Watetera, nos hommes veulent aller les combattre. C'est pourquoi maintenant, vous et nous, nous irons ensemble les battre. L'ivoire sera pour vous, nous prendrons les femmes". Tippo Tip refused (1974:89).

That evening, seven men from Utetera showed up and told Tippo Tip that they had been sent by their chief, the Kasongo Lushi, and that "il demande que vous veniez chez lui; chez nous, il y a beaucoup d'ivoire; d'ailleurs l'ivoire que vous venez d'acheter vient de chez nous" (ibid.). Tippo Tip replied affirmatively, adding that Kasongo was his grandfather. Four men of Kasongo returned and the three others stayed with Tippo Tip, who hid them because they were afraid. During the night, the drums sounded and Kasongo's men told Tippo Tip that he would be attacked the following day. Kasongo's men, whatever their ethnic origin, understood Songye drum language.

The following day, a fight broke out between Tippo Tip's men and the locals. Tippo Tip's men took many captives and many head of livestock, burned several villages, and built a fortified camp. Tippo Tip relates (ibid.: 31):

14. The most mysterious of these identifications is the equivalence established by Bontinck (Tippo Tip 1974: 234 fn 251) between the Kibumbe (group cited by Tippo Tip) and "les Bena Kibumbu, sous-tribu des Bakusu, établie à l'ouest du Lualaba, entre Kindu et Malela". The source cited is none other than myself: "Selon T. Turner J.A.H. XIII (1972) 3, p. 522 la population de Kimbombo [sic], fraction importante de Kindu, parle le Tetela". Bontinck is citing my review of Storme's La Mutinerie militaire au Kasai en 1895: he misunderstood not only the phrase in question but also the review as a whole. I wrote (Turner 1972: 522): "Tetela-speakers are rather numerous east of the Lomami: they make up nearly all the population of Kibombo territory, an important fraction of Kindu territory, and quelques groupements in Kasongo territory". Bontinck has me writing that the population of Kibombo lives in Kindu. I said nothing about the origin of the name "Kibombo." Bontinck's effort to call on me for help is ironic in that my review criticized Storme for misunderstanding the term "Tetela", i.e. for committing the same error of anachronism that Bontinck committed a few years later.
Dans l'après-midi, nous vîmes encore apparaître environ deux cents indigènes, mais ils se tinrent à bonne distance. Nous choisîmes une femme et l'envoyâmes auprès d'eux pour les inviter à s'approcher. Alors ils s'approchèrent sans crainte et nous remirent leurs lances, ares et flèches.

Tippo Tip returned their pigs and ordered them to send to him his friend Pange Bondo (a Kahua, who could not become chief again, because he had killed another chief [ibid.: 88]) Pange arrived and declared:

Beaucoup de gens de Mkahuja ont agi en traîtres en s'alliant au chef des Kirembwe et à Kungwa Kawamba pour vous barrer la route vers Utetera [...]. Maintenant que je suis ici, je vous demande d'appeler ceux qui sont venus avec moi et de m'investir de nouveau comme chef. Ils voudraient obtenir la remise en liberté de leurs enfants. Je vous prie d'agréer cette demande car les prisonniers Watetera sont nombreux tandis que le nombre de leurs gens capturés est minime." Je demandai : 'Comment pourrais-je distinguer les Watetera des autres?' Pange Bondo repondit : 'D'abord mettons-nous d'accord; je me chargerai du reste'" (ibid.: 91-92).

Tippo Tip made Pange Bondo chief, and the next day Pange returned with his people:

Le chef m'appela et me dit confidentiellement : 'Il n'y a même pas une centaine de jeunes gens à moi; appelez chaque homme individuellement. Quand vous verrez que je regarde par terre, vous direz : c'est un Mieterà; quand vous me verrez le visage et les yeux levés en haut, alors dites que c'est un homme à nous'" (ibid.: 92).

Using this trick, Pange Bondo and Tippo Tip divided the prisoners into two groups and also convinced the locals of the "magical power" of Tippo Tip.

If I have cited this passage at such length, it is because Bontinck finds it "passablement confus". There could not be many Tétela among the prisoners since the groups which had attacked Tippo Tip were the Bena Kahua, Nguo and Milembwe, all Songye groups. But in my view Kasongo had Songye subjects, some of whom had participated in the attack. Chief Kasongo recognized some of his men among Tippo Tip's prisoners (ibid.: 95).

Tippo Tip and his caravan continued their trip to Utetera "... et le quatrième jour, nous atteignîmes un très grand village de Watetera, qu'on appelle Msange, c'est-à-dire rassemblement, parce qu'il était composé d'une foule de gens de toutes les régions; ils s'y étaient rassemblés pour barrer la route à leurs ennemis, les Wasonge" (ibid.: 93). Bontinck tells us (ibid.: 237 fn 251) that there is a verb kusangana ("to unite"), in Lingala (why Lingala?). Tétela and Songye have equivalent verbs, nsanganywa and kusangisha respectively, so the village could have been composed of Tétela-speakers, Songye-speakers, or both.

Bontinck errs in referring the reader to Maes and Boone (1935) where broad definitions of ethnic groups are given. Tippo Tip himself
(1974: 96) gives a narrow definition of Songye: "... les Wasonge, les gens de Kirembwe et ceux de Mkahuja...".

Tippo Tip told Kasongo Lushi that he was his grandson, was accepted by the chief as his successor, and from this base built up a trading state in Maniema. Gongo was a slave of Tippo Tip before becoming one of his most important lieutenants. He seems to have been of Songye origin and his own lieutenants a mixture of what we would call Songye and Kusu, but his activities caused a great extension of the term Tetela.15

Later European Accounts

Accounts by later European witnesses confirm that the term “Tetela” once referred to Songye groups. The Canadian Hinde, who arrived in Lusambo in 1893 (in time to participate in the battles against Gongo Lutete) identifies Mpanya Mutombo as a Songye and Lumpungu as a Luba:

“It was during this time that the commissary of the district found that a regular human traffic was being carried on: the people on the upper river—the Basongo—themselves cannibals, being in the habit of selling slaves and children to the Basongo Meno for food. He therefore ordered the sentries on the river to take, or fire on, any canoes descending the river with children on board [...]. Some of the people belonging to Pania Mutumba (the chief of the tribe in question up the river) accompanied the commandant in an attack on Gongo Lutete” (Hinde 1897: 62).

Hinde visited the village of “Pania Mutumba” (Mpanya Mutombo), then that of Mono Kialo, whom he identifies as “a sub-chief of the Baluba race, the great chief being Lupungu, four days’ march to the southward, whom we afterwards visited” (ibid.: 79). Hinde also presents a very positive stereotype of the “Baluba”, i.e. Songye of Lupungu, who were “a fine, healthy, industrious race, the products of whose industries are to be found immense distances outside their own district. [...] The Baluba women are graceful, lively, gay, and industrious. The whole Baluba race, and the women more especially, are no darker than the Egyptians” (ibid.). Here we find the Mukendi-Roosens skin-color stereotype applied to the Songye!

Hinde, who met Gongo Lutete, tells us that Gongo “was born in Malela and was by blood a Bakussu” (ibid.: 86). However, a close reading makes it clear that the ethnic categories employed are not those of today:

"The band of brigands with which Gongo had surrounded himself were mostly of the Batetela race. These Batetela, and most particularly one tribe called the Bakussu, are, as far as I could ascertain from making inquiries in every direction, the most inveterate cannibals […] Through the whole of the Batetela country, extending from the Lubefu to the Luiki, and from the Lurimbi northwards for some five days' march, one sees neither grey hairs, nor halt, nor blind. Even parents are eaten by their children on the first sign of approaching decrepitude. It is easy to understand that, under the circumstances, the Batetela have the appearance of a splendid race" (ibid.: 89-90).

What is intriguing about this description is the location of "Batetela country". I take the "Lurimbi" to be the Ludimbi, which flows into the Lomami deep in Songye territory.16

The papers of Belgian officers who participated in the campaigns first against the "Arabs", then against the "Batetela mutineers", contain no reports of Songye having fought for or against the Free State. The Force publique, until the turn of the century, acquired its Congolese personnel by capture or purchase. In pay lists and passes (feuilles de route) those men generally were identified by name, rank and background, e.g. Nindjongo, Capl. Popoie. There appears to have been no formal system as to what ethnic labels were to be employed. The model may have been the "coastal" troops in Free State service, who often were identified by the recruitment point, e.g. Sierra Léone, Monrovien, Haoussa, Zanzibarite. Thus documents from the 1890s use ethnic labels which later would gain general acceptance (e.g. Mulengola, Mukussu, Waghenias, Bangala) and others which were doomed to disappear (e.g. Likangula, Lohali, Djabir, and the previously mentioned Popoie.17

The so-called "Batetela mutineers" of the Dhanis column were described by an eye-witness, Father Achte of the White Fathers, as being "des Manyemas".18 But in place of the broad label Maniema, Free State officers tended to use more specific labels. Doorme wrote that after Henry's victory over the mutineers at the Lindi River:

"... les révoltés se sont séparés en deux groupes: l'un composé de Tanganikas et de Wabudye dont les chefs sont respectivement Tikangufu et Zosi, se dirige sur Kambambare par la route de Masanze, ils comptent jeter leurs fusils pour tâcher de regagner leurs pays.

L'autre groupe commandé par Kandolo et composé de Bakussu, Bince, Malilas. [I take "Bince, Malilas" to mean Bena Malela or Malela people] et Batetelas, ayant appris que les Blancs de Nyangwe s'étaient sauvés, ils se dirigent vers ce

16. HINDE (1897: 297-301) also wrote of hearing so-called Tetela spoken in northern Katanga, far south of the Tetela Songye linguistic frontier.
17. Josué Henry de la Lindi, "Feuille de route, Avakubi, 24 janvier 1897"; "Feuille de route, Avakubi, 31 octobre 1897"; "Feuille de route, Avakubi, 8 novembre 1897", Papiers Josué Henry de la Lindi [henceforth JHL], Archives historiques, Musée royal d'Afrique centrale [henceforth MRAC], Tervuren (Belgique).
18. Père Achte, "Lettre à Van der Wielens, Katumba le 27 avril 1897", Papiers JHL, Archives historiques, MRAC.
poste rejoindre ensuite les révoltés du Lomami, et tâche de gagner le pays des Ton-Gombes. Saliboko s’est séparé des révoltés bien avant l’attaque du Commandant Henry et s’est fait accompagner de Piani Mzungu, et des Balubas avec fusils et cartouches dont le chef est Piani Kagombi, successeur du caporal Kagombe tué près d’Irumu…”

In a report to the Inspecteur d’État, Henry explained that “un groupe de révoltés sous les ordres d’un appelé Saliboko nous a échappé. Ce groupe comprend des Balubu et quelques Malelas”. Later in the same report, he added: “Ce sont les Malelas qui sont chefs de la révolte. Les Batetelas ne sont à proprement parler que des esclaves…”

It is impossible to know exactly what Achte, Henry, Doorme and the others meant by such labels as “Manyema”, “Batetelas”, “Balubas” and “Malelas.” There is no mention of “Basonge” among the mutineers but the “Balubas” of Piani Mzungu and Piani Kagombe, and the “Malelas” probably were Songye.

Administering what would become Kasai oriental, the Belgians initially perceived no Songye community. Pelzer and Gillain discussed whether the Baqua Kalagi (Bakwa Kalonji) should be left under the rule of Mpanya Mutombo, without referring to ethnic differences. This suggests that they considered Mpanya’s Songye and the Bakwa Kalonji both to be “Baluba”.

The statement of Commandant Borms (1901a: 289), who visited the region between the Lualaba (Upper Zaire) and Lomami Rivers in 1900-1901, is clearer still: “Quoique les populations de la rive gauche du Lualaba semblent appartenir à une même race, la race Songe, il faut cepen-dant faire une différence entre le Basonge proprement dit et le Batetela, qui ont chacun leur langue propre absolument distincte”.

**Crystallization of Songye and Tetela Identity**

The first major effort to collect information on individual ethnic or cultural groups resulted in a series of eleven volumes, including Van Overbergh’s *Les Basonge* (1907). Van Overbergh adopted the ethnographic questionnaire of the Société belge de sociologie and attempted to find answers to each of the 202 questions. His book consecrates the present

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22. Van Overbergh’s principal source of information was Robert Schmitz, agent of the Comité spécial du Katanga. Schmitz was chef de poste at Dibue (which I take to be Dibwe, east of the Lomami in the far north of the present Shaba
definition of the Songye community. For example the Bena Mona, previously referred to as such, are identified for the first time as a Songye subgroup.

In the introduction, Van Overbergh described the Songye as "de belle race", people whose "forgerons étaient renommés". Five years later, Van Overbergh continued (ibid.: vi). Wissmann crossed Songye country again and found devastation due to "Arab" raids. Entire subtribes had been exterminated and "l'im immense race des Baluba allait être sacrifiée". when the Congo Free State intervened:

"Auxiliaires des blancs pendant la lutte, les Basonge restèrent leurs sujets dévoués. Jamais il n'eut de différend grave. Et même, au temps de la crise de 1895, quand les Batetela révoltés de Luluabourg prirent la route du nord, les Basonge essayèrent de leur disputer le passage, malgré l'ininfériorité de leurs armements. Ils furent battus, mais ils restèrent fideles à l'Etat".

Here we see the distinction between Tetela and Songye ideologized: the "Batetela" revolted while the "Basonge" were faithful.

The key idea in the shifting stereotype of the "Luba" is not degree of civilization or openness to change but rather helpfulness to the Europeans. As of the Pogge and Wissmann visits, the "Luba" of the time (Lulua, in terms of more recent ethnic categories) were helpful and thus more intelligent and adaptable than other Africans. For a period beginning with the battles against Gongo Lutete and running at least as late as 1906, when Les Basonge was published, the Songye were given the most favorable assessment of any ethnic group in south-central Zaire. But by the 1920s, when missions had produced a first generation of educated Africans and the railroad across Kasai was being completed, the Luba-Kasai had become the most intelligent, adaptable group, because they were becoming valued auxiliaries of the colonial enterprise.

The spread of the label "Tetela" to include all Tetela-speakers of Kasai is due in large part to Torday, who visited the area in 1908-1909 but did not publish his findings until the 1920s. He defined the limits of the Tetela community as including all those Kasaian who spoke dialects of what is now called Otetela. The Tetela-speaking Kasu of Maniema were excluded (Torday & Joyce 1922: 3). There is a corollary to Jewsiewicki's observation that creation of a separate Kasai province, in which Luba was the vehicular language, greatly favored the Luba. By the same token, division of the four large provinces into six smaller ones disadvantaged both Tetela and Songye who were divided among three provinces, Katanga.

Region) in 1904 and 1905, while in 1906 and 1907 he occupied the same position at Tshofa, just west of the Lomami. That would seem to qualify him especially to discuss the north-central Songye, but VAN OVERBERGH (1907: xv) assures the reader that Schmitz "parcourit le territoire en tous sens et se documenta sur les mœurs des habitants avec la préoccupation constante de répondre au questionnaire de la Société belge de Sociologie".
Kivu and Kasai, each of which used a vehicular language other than Tetela or Songye.

Early “rapports d’enquête” prepared by Belgian administrators (and syntheses of such reports) reveal major contradictions as to the relationships among Luba, Songye and Tetela. Luba-Kasai from the Dibaya area told the Belgians that they, the Lulua, the Kanyok, the “Bayembi” (i.e. Songye) and the Kete all had a common ancestor, Nkole. Songye of Luluabourg (the so-called Zappo Zappo) denied any relationship with the Luba but claimed Nkole as an ancestor. Some Lulua of the Luluabourg area denied having Nkole as an ancestor.23

Songye of various origins, interrogated at Kabinda, claimed that all the Songye (narrowly defined), Kalebwe, Eki, Tshofwe, etc., were of common origins, but cited no common ancestor. Songye political institutions were attributed to the arrival in country of Luba piwe (“hunters”).24 However, a report based on research among the Songye of Tshofa claimed that the Songye and Tetela had a common ancestor. Piwe a ntoshi kwi Boloba and his wife Zibu a ntoshi had given birth to two sons: Kusu na Kankumba (ancestor of the Tetela) and Biki na Kankumba (ancestor of the Songye).25 It seems clear that the various informants were recounting traditions which explained ethnic and political relations in their own local areas. That being the case, the various traditions could be reconciled only by adopting one version and trimming the others so that they could be plugged into it.

The same “rapports d’enquête” suggest that the “historical enmity” between Luba and Tetela, illustrated by Mukendi’s research, is very recent in origin. As recently as 1920 a Belgian administrator collected the following story among the Luba of Dibaya:26

“La légende veut que lorsque Kole, père de Motumbo, voulut donner le total à sa progéniture déjà nombreuse, il plaça sur le sol de la viande humaine, de la viande de chèvre, des poules, de la bière de maïs, du tabac, du chanvre, des pains de manioc (bidia). Les Baluba choisirent la viande de chèvre, des poules, la bière de maïs, les houes indigènes et le bidia. Les Kanioka, le tabac et le vin de palme. Les Lulua, le chanvre, les poules et la viande de chèvre. Les Bayembi (Basonge), la viande humaine, la bière de maïs et les bidia. Les Bakete la viande humaine”.

This is not a legend from the dawn of history. Tobacco, maize and manioc (cassava) all are American crops. The Lulua adoption of a

“chanvre” (marijuana) smoking cult dates from the mid-nineteenth century. Attribution of cannibalism to the Yembi or Songye reflects the previous thirty years, when Songye raided Luba. The Tétela are absent from the story. But by the late 1950s, when political party activity began, Luba “knew” they had been raided by Tétela cannibals. The intervening variable was missionary education. The missionary church was one element in the Belgian colonial trinity and its contribution to the colonial enterprise was indoctrination.²⁷

The ethnic labels Luba, Songye, and Tétela all existed in the nineteenth century. They are attested to by the published accounts of the earliest visitors to the area, including Livingstone, Wissmann, Cameron and Tippo Tip. Yet none of the labels had its present connotation. Luba applied to many peoples scattered across the present Shaba (Katanga), Maniema, and East and West Kasai regions. It has undergone considerable narrowing so that it now applies only to the large ethnic groups known as Luba-Shaba and Luba-Kasai, respectively. The Lulua, in particular, have become a separate ethnic group. In contrast, the labels Songye and Tétela have acquired much broader currency. Each one applied to a subgroup of the people now known as Songye, but today each refers to a large ethnic community.

The cases of ethnogenesis among the Lulua, Luba-Kasai, Tétela and Songye all support my contention that “primordialism” is wide of the mark. However the views of Brass (1991), linking ethnicity and nationalism to the activities of the modern centralizing state, and of Jewsiewicki (1989), linking them to capitalism, are a bit too sweeping. The Lulua identity was formed in the era of the Royaume de l’amitié, prior to 1895.²⁸ In general, “instrumentalism” is too simple to fit the facts. There is elite manipulation but there are unintended consequences too, and more interaction between Belgians and Africans, and between leaders and followers among Africans, than the instrumentalist model suggests. Finally, one cannot unravel the process of ethnogenesis among the Africans without tracing the development of the concept of ethnogenesis among the observers.


²⁷ Les agents du gouvernement ne travaillent pas seuls à l’œuvre de la civilisation. Les œuvres religieuses y participent dans une mesure au moins égale; les entreprises commerciales elles-mêmes y collaborent. “Agents, missionnaires et commerçants se doivent un mutuel appui” (MINISTÈRE DES COLONIES 1918; ii, see also Youss. 1965: 10).

²⁸ See also Roberts (1989) on the role of the “Christian kingdom” in defining the boundaries of the Tabwa community.
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