

effects of increasing state disengagement and of globalisation. The latter, itself sustained by a process of liberalisation, led to African universities decentralising their operations and improving their funding strategies by means of structural adjustment policies (Akam et Ducasse 2002). But little research has been conducted on the effects of the increase in student numbers or, more broadly, on the demand for university education. Some have seized upon this gap in our knowledge as an opportunity to introduce, alongside the emergence of new management practices, a radical rethinking of higher education programmes. On the one hand, proponents of decreasing state intervention have been able to rely on political deregulation to allow universities to free themselves from the burdens of tradition and to take up the challenge of better preparing their students for the labour market. On the other hand, the romantic ideologues of the "native land" — who continue to read African history from the viewpoint of an oppositional model contrasting "them" against "us" — have found in the African university crisis an ideal opportunity to substitute for the colonial and neo-colonial university "Eurocentrism" an "Afrocentrism" versed in "tradition" and "authenticity."

To flesh out the analyses mentioned above and to test the hypothesis that a new cultural model of education — "more professional" or "more authentic" — is emerging, this article takes as a case study the demand for education at the University of Lubumbashi (UNILU) in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the following sections, after a brief description of the context of the 1990s, three aspects of this demand are examined: its dynamics, the way it is managed by the university in the face of financial difficulties, and its relation to the labour market. This shift in perspective allows us not only to anchor the university in a local environment, with its own history, but also to evaluate the role it fulfils for different categories of actors, and particularly for professional training.¹

A Contradiction

At the end of the 1970s, the Zairian economy collapsed following plummeting share prices for copper, the failure of measures of Zairianisation, and an ill-informed economic policy. Since state currency revenues had been built on mining exports to more than seventy percent, when external trade terms deteriorated, produc-

The University of Lubumbashi between the Local and the Global: Dynamics, Management, and Future of University Education in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Benjamin Rubbers

Résumé

Jusqu'à présent, la dynamique du champ universitaire en Afrique a surtout été interprétée à partir du désengagement budgétaire de l'Etat et de la crise économique. Pour compléter cette approche, cet article propose une étude de cas qui tente de cerner le sens dont est investi, au niveau local, la formation assurée par l'Université de Lubumbashi, en République Démocratique du Congo. Ce détour par le bas montre que le devenir de l'Université en Afrique représente un enjeu important pour les différentes catégories d'acteurs concernées, dont la nature avant tout symbolique est susceptible de contre-carrier les projets politiques, de couler tantôt libérale tantôt tiers-mondiste, nourris à son égard dans les pays du Nord.

Introduction

In sub-Saharan Africa, universities are going through a time of change as a result of many factors — the creation of new faculties and schools, rising registration fees, deteriorating material conditions for teaching, graduate "unemployment," the individualisation of academic careers via social networks, and the increasingly applied nature of research (Saint 1992; Lebeau 2002). This wave of conflicting changes was brought about by the widening of student access, as well as by decreased state funding. These two developments have caused university staff to depend less on central administration and more on student registration fees, as well as on funds received from international donor organisations.

Generally speaking, the study of the university in transition from a bureaucratic institution to an entrepreneurial organisation — which is, in a sense, privatised — has focused particularly on the

tion in practically all economic sectors slumped (Peemans 1997ab; Ndaywel E Nziem 1998). Nevertheless, official employment continued to grow during this period in both the private and the public sectors: in total it went from 777 800 at the beginning of the period of economic difficulty to 1 194 000 in 1980 (De Herdt et Marysse 1996, 56-57). However, real income in both private and public sectors fell dramatically during the 1970s from an index of 100 to 21.4 and 43.4 respectively (De Herdt et Marysse 1996, 56-57, 60-61).

In 1983, Zaire adopted a severe structural adjustment plan proposed by the IMF: a drastic reduction in public expenditure, devaluation of the Zairian currency, a floating exchange rate, and liberalisation of both prices and interest rates. The effects of these policies enabled the government to temporarily control inflation; thus, for a while, an upturn in the Zairian economy was expected, and the average growth rose to two percent (Lukusa 1999). However, the measures to liberalise the economy had especially benefited commerce at the expense of production (Peemans 1997b). Consequently, inflation took off again from 1985: in 1986 it rose to sixty-five percent, while in 1987, it reached seventy-five percent. The measures proposed by the IMF had a negative impact, especially on employment and salaries in the public sector. From 1980 to 1985, the number of civil servants halved, while the real income of those who remained in work continued to decline, from 21.4 in 1980 (index 100: 1970) to 10.9 in 1989 (De Herdt et Marysse 1996, 57).²

At the beginning of the 1990s, Zaire entered a new era of transformations, which, it was widely hoped, would be positive. On 24 April 1990, President Mobutu announced that the country would open up to political pluralism. However, the dreams of such liberalisation disappeared a few days later during the night of 10-11 May, when the regime sent troops to carry out retaliatory action against the students of the campus of Lubumbashi, some of whom had brutalised individuals thought to be informers working for the President.

The hope for an economic upturn collapsed at the same time as the Kamoto mine of Kolwezi did in the month of September 1990. The collapse of the mine brought about a sudden decline of the *Gécamines* (*Générale des Carrières et des Mines*), the large mining

company of Katanga,³ as well as a sudden shortage of foreign currency throughout the country.⁴ As a result, production decreased by fifty percent in all economic sectors, except agriculture, and the already inadequate state budgets could no longer sustain the civil service or education. Thus, in 1995, the Kengo government had to dispense with the services of half of its 600 000 civil servants, while those who remained at work enjoyed an income of no more than the equivalent of \$5 dollars per month. Meanwhile, the level of employment in the private sector fell by sixty-one percent from 1991 to 1994 (Lukusa 1999).

Moreover, the entire Zairian economy was hit by hyperinflation: the consumer price index in Kinshasa, based on an index of 100 in 1990, spiralled to around 2 250 in 1991, 95 300 in 1992, and 1 990 000 in 1993 (Peemans 1997). In October 1993, in Kinshasa, the buying price for one dollar was seven million zaires. Inflation brought about a general deterioration in living conditions, to the point where numerous families went to the Lubumbashi markets to buy "ôvimbaö" flour for food, a flour which has gone bad and is traditionally sold as animal feed (Petit 2004).⁵ This period of increasing poverty, from 1990 to 1995, was called the "Somali period" by the people of Lubumbashi, in reference to the famine that had broken out there some years earlier. It was at this time that what the Congolese called the "crisis" began, an era of extreme poverty that has continued up to today (Petit and Mulumbwa, forthcoming).⁶

This collective impoverishment was accompanied by a series of tensions and conflicts. Firstly, the looting of 21-22 October 1991 crushed the remaining strength of shopkeepers and small industrialists in Lubumbashi, who guaranteed a certain economic viability during the disaster and who would have been able to ensure an upturn after the situation had calmed. In addition, the ruin of these entrepreneurs brought about the crash of the national railway company, formerly one of the main employers in the region.

Then, from 1991 to 1994, the governor of the province, Kyungu Wa Ku Mwanza, mobilised the Katangese people to expel the Kasaians and drive them back to their own region. Thousands were forced to leave their job, their small business, and, sometimes, their wife and children, to go to a province that the majority of them had never even known (Bakajika Banjikila 1997; Dibwe 2001).

The arrival of the troops of the *Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo* (AFDL) and the takeover of power by L.-D. Kabila on 17 May 1997 induced a new glimmer of hope in the inhabitants of Lubumbashi, all the more so because the new President was himself from Katanga. In particular, the graduates of the UNILU hoped to find employment in the new administration and enjoy a comfortable salary. Such hopes, however, were not to be realised because of the onset of war on 2 August 1998; in fact, they could not be entertained again until an uncertain time in the future. Meanwhile, families continued trying to find help from their working relatives even though wages were hardly enough to feed a household for a few days a month (Petit 2003). When not faced with the restrictions imposed by the war and the poor state of the means of communication, more and more graduates found themselves having to supplement their salaries by undertaking additional, unofficial work. Globally, although the relevance of the distinction between official and unofficial might be questioned (MacGaffey 1991), this informal economy is today evaluated at more than seventy percent of the national income of the Congo (De Herdt et Marysse 1996, 38).

A priori, university students' families are directly affected by redundancies and worsening salary levels: the majority of posts held by members of these families are in the urban public sector (Petit et Kabamba 2000). However, the economic climate of the 1980s and 1990s cannot, in itself, be considered sufficient to characterise the changes in educational enrolment. On the contrary, university enrolment during this decade not only remained steady at its previous level, but, in fact, judging by the increase in student numbers at the UNILU, rose sharply: the student population at the beginning of the 1980s was estimated at 2 800, while today, the UNILU has approximately 22 000 students, of whom 18 000 are at Lubumbashi itself.⁷

This increase in university registrations of course also reflects the growth of the population of Lubumbashi: standing at 432 901 in July 1973 and 564 830 in 1984, it had risen to around 1.2 million by 2001 (Houyoux et Lecoanet 1975; INS 1991; Bureau central de recensement 2001). However, while the population of the city grew by approximately 212 percent from 1984 to 2001, the number of students at the UNILU grew by 379 percent. In other words, the

growth of the student population occurred in part independently from that of the urban population.

University Education as a Rite of Passage

THE VALUE OF THE DEGREE

Although job opportunities worsened, university education met with greater and greater success. It is difficult to know how to interpret such a development that occurred against all expectations. From the comments of those people interviewed, it seems firstly that the university degree is assumed to give the graduate the possibility to attain a prestigious professional status, which will bring responsibilities, authority, and a substantial income. Whatever the economic situation, it is in this sense that the degree represents a valuable investment in preparation for the job market. A recent study of eighty-four households, carried out by the *Observatoire du Changement Urbain*, has shown that the inhabitants of Lubumbashi are not wrong: the study reveals a clear positive correlation between level of study and income of the head of the household (Petit 2003, 105). Even though *Falaise ki m'falanga* to ("French isn't money"), those heads of household who have the highest income are equally those who hold the highest educational qualifications.

Hence, the demand for university education has not let up in the face of the Congolese economic depression. The lootings and the collapse of the *Gécamines*, for example, brought about only a slight downturn in student numbers. In fact, families are constantly preparing themselves for an eventual opening up of the job market. When job opportunities do appear, university graduates will thus be in a good position to seize them:

The good days will come. We already want to have our administrative reference number in the public sector and then the day things get going, we're there!

The advent of the Kabila regime thus raised a new wave of hope among the population. One effect of this was a general increase in the number of students, particularly in law and social sciences: this may be the case because these are the immediate doors to powerful positions in the administrative and judicial systems.

The large majority of graduates come from families for whom a

salariated position in the public sector is the norm. For these people, a university degree seems to be strongly associated with a managerial position — an economically enviable one until the end of the 1980s. The professional aspirations of young secondary school graduates⁸ are, of course, still not clear: their horizons generally stop at completing the first year of university successfully or at obtaining a university degree. But parents, themselves salariated, envisage a future for their children in the public structures of the region.

However, not all students wish to take up a salariated position. Some hope to follow in their fathers' footsteps and, having once completed their studies, become established in the import-export business. On the one hand, this type of activity is part of family tradition passed on from father to son: even while still at school, the son will help his father in the latter's business transactions. On the other hand, the father's success shows that trade allows a certain lifestyle. In this vein, Victor,⁹ the son of an MPR¹⁰ deputy, told me:

I grew up in an environment of finance. We were in Binza in Kinshasa and we had fun with money. We did a bit of trade with my father, we were on the circuit, there was money around and we told ourselves that to have a stable marriage and family, you had to have the means. So I said to myself "me, I'm going to do business, be an economist."

But as he was counting on eventually setting up his own business activities, I wanted to know why Victor took up university education. His reply was:

You know, in our country, when you haven't done your studies, you don't have a hope of getting a decent job and being respected in society: you're not well thought of when you haven't done your studies. That's why you'll notice that people with financial stability go back to school to try to get some education and ... psychological too, because education isn't just intellectual, it's also knowing how to be, how to live — it improves you, you know.

In other words, the choice of taking up studies at the UNILU is not made simply on the basis of it being an economic investment: student life is not organised exclusively around the "educational imperatives of learning" any more than in other regions of the

world [Bourdieu et Passeron 1964, 86-87; Lebeau 1997, 297]. On the contrary, the continuing uptake of university education, beyond the consequences of the crisis, depends directly on the reproduction of an educational ideology, which confers on the degree itself the symbolic power to provide upward social mobility.¹¹ Seen as men of the world, graduates are elevated to the status of "university intellectual." Standing out notably through a certain ease in social relations ("We're at ease, we're at ease, everywhere we go. We know how to get along.") the status sets graduates apart not only from "those who have not studied," but also from secondary school graduates. In summary, there are two reasons for wanting to obtain a university degree. First, it enables the graduate to acquire a prestigious professional status; second, it is itself considered to be a title of nobility. These motivations underlie the investment in an educational qualification, requiring that the would-be graduate find the material and financial means — from parents, cousins, members of the extended family, and religious organisations — to support all or part of their university studies.

* 4

A COLONIAL HERITAGE

To understand how determined families are to obtain an education, it is necessary to consider strategies of social mobility in the "civilisation" of Katanga, which provide the frames of perception, an appreciation of the objectives to be reached, and a repertoire of possible behaviours (Warnier 1993, 256).

The rapid expansion of the town was strongly linked to the development of the mining companies, while the increasing numbers of migrant workers were put to the test of salariated work early on (Fetter 1976). From the 1920s, the majority of the town's inhabitants of working age became salariated workers; their percentage of the town's economically active population has been evaluated at ninety percent at the beginning of the 1950s, at eighty-five percent in 1973, at 45.2 percent in 1984, and at forty-two percent in 2000 [MacCulloch 1956, 182-87; M'bokolo 1985, 201; Houyoux et Lecoanet 1975, 28; Bruneau et Pain 1990, 72; Petit 2003, 224]. In other words, university students come from families whose ties with rural life have been severed for some generations. This separation dates back to the 1920s and 1930s, a time when the great colonial companies favoured splintering the "dangerous classes"

and stabilising a permanent working class.

These workers were soon assimilated into organisations highly hierarchised according to race, qualification, and professional status. Gradually, these attributes became the determining factors used to differentiate individuals and groups: at the bottom of the hierarchy we find "servants" and "indigenous merchants," occupations carried out in the 1950s mainly by the Lamba; at the higher echelons were "white collar workers" and "skilled workers," mainly represented by the Kasaians (Siegel 1989, 360-62; Young 1965, 264).¹² Today, still, the former are considered to be "dirty," "ignorant," and "lazy," while the latter are viewed as "hard workers" and "open to modernity" (Rubbers 2000). If this is so, it is because the rules of the game have not fundamentally changed: an educational qualification and a professional status continue to sustain definitions of identity and otherness.

Nowadays, in a certain way, the university degree promotes its holder to a status equivalent to that held by the highest managerial levels of the colonial institutions. During the time of the Belgian Congo, university education was not only denied to Africans, but was furthermore inaccessible to all but a tiny fraction of the white population. Consequently, when the first universities were established during the early years of the 1950s, the university degree came to represent an unprecedented means of social enhancement. While the highest position attainable for the indigenous population was the occupation of clerk, the holder of a university qualification could expect to be entitled to immediate access to managerial positions in companies and public administration. This is, in fact, what happened some years later, after independence.

Nevertheless, after two decades of the university elite being coopted by the regime of the time, the winds began to change. From the beginning of the 1980s, the qualification no longer necessarily led to powerful positions in public organisations and, similar to "those who have not studied," graduates had to learn to get along by themselves to survive. However, to the extent that a university qualification is still associated with the status of a manager, graduates can continue to define themselves virtually as such, and secondary school students, with the same hopes for the future as their predecessors, continue to apply for studies in higher education. The symbolic value of the degree, defended by students as well

as by workers and their families, has also been the subject of public debate in the past and, still, today. When it was necessary to revise the medical studies programme for the independent Congo, a controversy arose over the equivalence of Congolese and Belgian degrees. As the academic authorities were trying to make the training of doctors more relevant to the ecological and societal characteristics of the Congo, they met massive opposition from African students, who, fearing that the value of their degree would come to be seen as third-rate, demanded that medical training in the Congo be modelled on that given in Belgium. In the same way today, arguments over private universities seem to centre less on answering the question, "What is a degree for?" than on, "Who has the right to award a degree?" (For a similar observation, in another context, see Khelifaoui 2000, 56-65).¹³ For a major part of the population, everything happens as though the official institution, as the rightful heir of the colonial university, has a monopoly on the right to dispense legitimate knowledge and to select those who will receive it. The comments of one medical student, who was asked by his uncle to return to Kasai at the time when pogroms were being carried out against people of Kasaiian origin, illustrates this point well:

He came and said "let's all go to Kasai, otherwise the Katangese people will kill us all."

I laughed: "I came here to get a degree. Wait till I've got my degree! I would rather die without a degree than live to see the day I don't get it. You're advising me to go to a private university [Mbuji Mayi] to get an unrecognised degree? Do you want to cheapen me, or what?" That's how I came to stay here on my own.

AN ORDEAL

From this urban melting pot, new forms of social distinction came to be constructed or "reinvented," founded on — to use the terms of J.C. Mitchell (1956, 1987) — the characteristics of "the European way of life."¹⁴ In these conditions, a university education represented, from the end of the colonial period, a ritualised access to the heart of "modernity," understood to be the culture of the dominating group (the colonisers), as it was perceived by the dominated (the colonised). Today, the university continues to represent for both

students and their families a "temple" of abstract thought. Obtaining a degree is considered to be not only like acquiring a title of nobility, in so far as it is both prestigious and everlasting, but, at the same time, like completing an initiation rite into esoteric knowledge, in that the "science" that students acquire possesses a magical character. Indeed, as a culture of the "universal," "science" allows graduates to become active members of a much wider society ("I've become universal, even so"), leading them to a greater understanding of human affairs ("you have to keep up with modernity").

From the comments of those people who were interviewed, moving into the world of the university thus opens up a long liminal period (Turner 1990) reaching out of the structured worlds of school and family life and, finally, introducing the student to a new economic and familial stability.¹⁵ It is a difficult period, an ordeal which begins with *bleusailles* (games), during which the new students are ridiculed (Petit et Kabamba 2000, 113-17),¹⁶ and which continues in the auditoriums of a dilapidated and overcrowded campus with poor public transport access.¹⁷

Moreover, passing the exams of the first year is not always viewed as representing the result of study and of the ability to work: according to those interviewed, it sometimes occurs (for other students, never for them) on the basis of corruption, sending in "mercenaries" (substitute students), "pulling strings," or cheating. After the order and discipline of school, the conditions at the university thus make the experience of studying similar to that of a "battle" for success:

We struggled against the university because the university wasn't there for us. But we forced the university to accept us.... Yes, it was really a bit of a jungle: everything was difficult.

This battle was also fought against their own "drives" for, in discovering student life, the newly arrived found themselves being offered "freedom," "emancipation," "perversion," and "depravity" simultaneously. All these dimensions of their newly found independence went to their heads, they said, and are frequently cited as being responsible for students failing their first year. However, after a year, the students adapt to their new life and show themselves, from then on, to be competent, sometimes after a "divine intervention" to shun "vice" in favour of work and "piety."

In reality, the "way of God" not only helps students steer clear of the dangers of *déviation*, but also protects them from assaults through witchcraft, believed to be widespread within the university (Petit et Kabamba 2000, 144-45). Indeed, according to numerous people interviewed, both within and outside the university, while some students "steal" the knowledge of others, some university teachers are assumed to have come into possession of their knowledge from the "mystical world": they have "sacrificed" someone from their close circle of acquaintances and offered this person at a dinner to belong to a Rosicrucian or Freemasonic occult lodge,¹⁸ still, today, they attend suppers during which the participants share the body of the person bewitched by a new candidate.

In this social environment that the inhabitants of Lubumbashi consider ripe for witchcraft, studying requires Christian protection, whether this is assured by prayer or attendance at church. Among the possibilities of the latter, the Pentecostal Church is considered to be particularly effective against evil spells. Aside from students' desire to show their independence from their parents, the majority of whom are still Catholic, this desire for protection is one of the primary reasons many of them convert to this interpretation of the Christlike message once they have arrived on campus.

In the final analysis, confronted with *baptême* (initiation), deplorable conditions in which to study, cheating, "temptations," and the danger of witchcraft, the students must show humility, courage, moral strength, intelligence, and piety. Not until the end of the trials and tribulations of this "battle," at the edges of conventional social space, will these students be eligible to attain a new position of power, worthy of the highest respect.

AN ANOMALY

Fortunately, the battle that university studies represent is not fought alone. Above and beyond their personal abilities, students can count on numerous forms of social activity: sports clubs, prayer groups, scientific circles, and study groups. Beyond these different associations, students also represent themselves as a united collectivity, indivisible in the face of the ordeal of university education. Rooted in a shared definition of their situation and destiny, this *esprit de corps* is sustained by many forms of privileged mutual

support, as well as by the term "neighbour," which students use to address each other.

In the same way, from an outsider's perspective, the students constitute a unified social whole. To use the terms of Mary Douglas (1971), the category of student appears to be an anomaly, being at one and the same time a source of disorder and a source of power. As far as the family is concerned, students are freed from the usual responsibilities of intergenerational support given to relatives and thus represent, in stark contrast to others of their age, economic dependants. Moreover, temporarily freed from the controlling influence of the descent group, they are perceived to be casual and dangerous lovers: associating university studies with a "libertine" lifestyle, parents warn their children of the moral corruption of "neighbours." Any amorous relations with these could lead to being an unmarried mother, or, worse still, to death from Aids. Nevertheless, the students remain highly esteemed and are regularly consulted to help resolve family problems: as the family reminds them of the "debt" they have taken on (Marie 1997), they are equally prepared to take on their future responsibilities as graduates of the university.

The university campus itself appears as a material and symbolic space located outside normal social life. Built away from the town, it is partially outside the control of the authorities: thus, neither the military nor the rector dares venture there too frequently. Inside, the law of the students reigns, creating a breeding ground for political disorder within local society. Indeed, the students of the Kassapa campus represent an uncontrollable power, just as likely to serve those who oppose the power structures of society as they are to serve those in dominant positions.

It is only at the end of their university studies that students lose their status of exception, place themselves under the authority of institutional powers once again (the state, the university, the family), and thus become reintegrated into normal social life. More precisely, the ordeal of university studies ends when students receive their degrees at the "conferment" ceremony, during which the new social position they have attained is recognised by representatives of the state, academic authorities, and the family.

On the one hand, the ceremonial procedure explicitly affirms a transformation of social status, from that of "profane" to that of

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"university intellectual." Following a long series of speeches, this part of the ritual is orchestrated by representatives of the university and official persons. Seated on the platform of the great hall of the university campus, they hand over the degree certificates and shake hands with all the graduates one by one. Each wearing the robes that designate faculty and year of graduation, the students are greeted with the shouts and applause of the audience.

On the other hand, this celebration ritualises the transition from youth to adulthood: the completion of studies meshes with the symbolic severance from adolescence. Members of the family network wait for "their child" to emerge from the building and throw talcum powder over their head, as in previous times, when they covered young initiates with kaolin powder. Once the ceremonial proceedings are over, close friends and family gather together for a celebratory drink at the new graduate's home, a procedure similarly observed for births, marriages, and funerals. From that point on, the graduates are expected to make something of their degree — that is, to find well-paid employment, begin a family, set up in a new home, and take their places again, but from a more advantageous position, in the mechanisms of maintaining family solidarity.¹⁹

The University as a Source of Power and Wealth

Having lost state funding completely, is the UNILU in a position to absorb the increased number of students wanting to undertake university studies? Indeed, far from simply meeting the growing demand for education, the university authorities are actually encouraging it by creating extensions in other towns in the Congo, as well as additional faculties and studies, such as the *Ecole Supérieure de Commerce* (1997) and the faculties of agronomy (1995), psychology (1995), and pharmacy (1998).

In a country that has only three official universities, these measures are likely explained by the willingness of the authorities to allow the greatest number of students access to higher education and to offer them a wide range of studies, both general and specialised. The measures are, however, heavily criticised by students from the different faculties since the auditoriums are overcrowded, equipment is non-existent, and there is a shortage of teaching staff. Thus, the intentions of the authorities are

outweighed by economic motivations: the technical and academic staff of the university, who receive a meagre salary (from \$10 to \$40 per month), on an irregular basis, survive by means of the registration fees and private gifts brought in by the students (which allow the staff to receive a salary up to \$170 per month). Thus, it is the number of students who register that ensures the efficient functioning of the university, a public institution that has, for more than ten years, undergone a process of "internal privatisation" (Olivier de Sardan 2001).²⁰

Alongside this, student control represents a political stake for the regime in place. Under the Second Republic, universities came under the influence of the *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution*, becoming the spearhead of "authenticity," a state ideology associating the themes of development and "invented tradition" (Young and Turner 1985; Tshibangu 1998, 102-03; Bongo- Pasi Moke Sangol et Tsakala Mumikengi 2003, 99-117). During this period, the Zairian university assured the subjugation of the national elite to the power in place at the time by training and coopting this elite within public and semi-public structures.

With the advent of the new regime, in 1997, the ideological autonomy of the university remained limited as well: the presidency controlled the institution through both the rector — a political appointment — and *Comités de Pouvoir Populaire*, local units of "civic" control directly linked to the presidency. Although the Kabila government also prohibited all forms of speech criticising the regime, it nonetheless differed from the dictatorship of Mobutu in so far as it did not use the university to undertake a "political education" of the urban population of the Congo.

Similarly, at the regional level, the university was invested with political actors based in different institutions and from different geographical regions. Since the academic authorities are particularly well-placed in this respect, they tried to mobilise the student population to reinforce their power or to oust an adversary in the local political arena. However, channelling this social force proved relatively unreliable so that the governing body of the UNILU had to reassure themselves regularly of the support, or the silence, of the most influential students, without which the latter may well have served the interests of their political opponents and thus work against the plans of the leadership of the university.

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One example occurred in 2001, when the Vice-Governor of the province, who wanted to weaken the university's control of the provincial administration, succeeded in ousting the rector by stirring up the discontent of students who were unhappy with the level of the registration fees. Whereas the rector came from south Katanga (a *Tshokwe*), the students were, in the main (it was said) refugees from the war in the north of the province (*Hemba*), led by members of the *Comité de Pouvoir Populaire*. The demands of the students thus became interconnected with a local political conflict, a regional ethnic mobilisation (North Katanga and South Katanga), and internal tensions at the university between the rectorate and the grass roots of the CPP. Once the political rivals of the rector within the university's Governing Council arrived from Kinshasa to take stock of events, the UNILU's governing body, presided over by the rector, had been suspended and replaced by a provisional commission until the nomination of a new person.

The University as an Institution of Professional Training

AN INADEQUATE LINK

For the different study disciplines, it is clear that university education does not prepare students adequately for the labour market. By way of example, the case of graduates in social sciences, medicine, and engineering sciences — three university programmes leading to quite different opportunities for employment — will be briefly discussed.

As far as graduates in social sciences are concerned, if they can obtain a position in an administration created during the transition or under the new regime, the posts they hold generally correspond to functions that neither require a university qualification, nor offer prospects for promotion within a career, and they bring in a salary which, although reasonable at the beginning of the Kabila regime, very soon failed to keep pace with inflation. These conditions favoured the development of corruption and the combining of an official position and "business" in the second economy (MacGaffey 1991, 10).

In the medical sector, if young practitioners find a salaried position, they prefer to work in health care facilities located in towns,

be they in the Congo or abroad, rather than those in rural areas. Similarly, in urban areas, they are attracted to medical facilities in the centre of town that are not easily accessible to the poorer population, who live in the outskirts. Although the geographical distribution of practitioners is also determined by their different personal commitments (profession, family, couple), the graduates in medicine of the UNILU continue in this way to reproduce social inequality in access to health care (Rubbers 2003; Persyn et Ladrère 2003, 81-96).

For their part, engineering graduates no longer have any prospects for work. A large number of families, and especially those whose parents worked at the *Gécamines*, invested in the education of their children to enable them to find a position in the same company. They believed that they could then benefit in their turn from all the advantages and services provided by this paternalistic organisation. Registration in the engineering sciences faculty was thought to guarantee the transmission, from one generation to the next, of positions for managerial class families and an upward mobility, which, until then, families of employees and workers could not hope for. However, the collapse of the Kamoto mine, the slump in production, and the expulsion of the Kasaians spelt the end of a social world whose traditions had lasted for more than half a century: its ruin led families to feel disillusioned and in the mood for revolt (Dibwe 2001).

For the young engineers, and even more so for those with family roots in Kasai, the opportunity to be taken on by the *Gécamines* has become an illusion. With this direction barred to them, the graduates try to find positions in the expatriate companies established in the region. These, however, if they have not relocated outside the area following the war of aggression on the Congo by Rwanda and Uganda, more often prefer to hire European managers or the former employees of the *Gécamines*, better able (according to the employers) to hold positions of responsibility and to use up-to-date computer and mining technologies.²¹

SALARIED POSITIONS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Whether they are graduates in social sciences, doctors or engineers, the students of the UNILU are the heirs of a long tradition of salaried work;²² they perpetuate a certain attachment to a position

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in an administration or in a company. In other words, the disillusionment of the 1990s did not immediately give way to personal initiatives in the second economy. By contrast, young graduates first look for a salaried position, either in the public or private sectors.

Nevertheless, during the course of their university studies, the students perceive more clearly the openings their training may lead to, and, according to the job opportunities their degree may offer them, they either become resigned to developing independent activities or refuse more or less resolutely to do so. Thus, for the majority of engineers, their plans to find employment in Katanga fade as the years pass. Thoroughly fed up with their situation, some think of joining the ranks of those wanting to leave for Europe or for southern Africa. Making a virtue of necessity, others aspire to become businessmen: they move into the second economy on a lasting basis and hope finally to develop, they insist, a production or commercial company.

In this sense, for the graduates as a whole, entrepreneurship has increasingly become a pragmatic solution in the long term. A salaried position, however, is not rejected out of hand: even if it no longer necessarily represents an end in itself, it is thought of as an eventual step which could facilitate — by virtue of the personal contacts that it gives — the opportunity to create in the political and economic world the conversion of the graduate into an entrepreneur (Labazée 1991, 535).

THE REPRODUCTION OF ELITES

In a country where a large part of the population is illiterate, the university community represents a cultural elite. But in a climate of *débrouille* (resourcefulness), the ability of its members to move into the political and economic bourgeoisie is less dependent on the value of the degree than it is on how far their social network extends and where it is anchored. In the real economy of the Congo (MacGaffey 1991), chances of success are higher for those who have strategic support available to them than for those who distinguish themselves by their academic achievements.

However, according to the faculty attended, the relative weight of the social capital inherited via the family and that created at the university clearly varies: thus, graduates in social sciences make

use especially of their relatives, whereas doctors rely more on their professional network. It follows that the opportunities for social mobility are proportionally greater in medicine for students from a socially modest background. In the social sciences, the opportunities are fewer, but better controlled by members of the political and administrative bourgeoisie.

This having been said, the return on the university degree, as well as the economic and social value of the familial network, are directly affected by economic, political, and social change. The crisis, the decline of state-owned companies, inflation, the war, the change in regime, the imposed moves between professional posts — as well as death, disease, and migrations — all combine to make educational and professional careers move in unpredictable directions. May it suffice at this point to recall the fate of those engineers expecting to be able to move into a position in the same company as that of their father, the disillusion affecting those social science students with family members who held positions of power under the Mobutu regime, or even the attitude of resignation of those doctors forbidden to return to their province of birth when occupied by the enemy forces of Rwanda or Uganda.

In short, although the social environment of the university allows, in certain faculties, the creation of a useful relational network in a given professional domain, the higher education degree today no longer ensures the production or reproduction of elites. To the extent that these are no longer systematically coopted by the regime, the students must, from now on, rely exclusively on the personal support of politicians, warlords, or entrepreneurs.

Conclusion

The changes brought about by the disengagement of the state from education do not spell the end of the University of Lubumbashi. On the one hand, to meet the challenge of the new economic order of the 1990s, the academic authorities have succeeded in ensuring an "entrepreneurial" management of the institution and have adopted a discourse likely to attract foreign sponsors.²³ On the other hand, to respond to the demands of the population in terms of social mobility, the same authorities must perpetuate the symbolic extra-territoriality of the university as an institution which organises — on the margins of society — a ritualised access to the heart of

"modernity," understood as a universal, esoteric, and abstract culture. It is this symbolic construction that explains the determined pursuit of education demonstrated by families regardless of the "crisis," the prestige that university teachers enjoy in spite of their relative poverty, and the strategies that local political actors have implemented in order to monopolise the promotion of young men and women to the status of university "intellectual."²⁴

That being the case, the University of Lubumbashi has hardly managed to create the conditions to adapt more effectively to the real economy, official and unofficial. Having become a privatised public institution, it has adopted a new economic policy, a more "entrepreneurial" one, so that scientific research is more oriented towards the application of knowledge than it used to be. But for all that, it still does not instruct students in management, in entrepreneurship, or in the reality of their future professional domain. Moreover, private employers in the region (expatriates in the main) consider university graduates educated in the last twenty years to be "arrogant" but "incompetent," both in terms of their technical knowledge and in terms of management; in fact, when experienced workers are not available, such employers often prefer to recruit young secondary school leavers and train them on the job.

In this sense, in a context of deep crisis that affects all social categories of the population of Lubumbashi, a university education at the UNILU represents stakes that are symbolic for the students, economic for the academic authorities, and political for the regime and local politicians, rather than a means of obtaining the skills to meet the demands of the job market. It follows, then, that this institution remains out of touch with a large part of the society within which it is established nor is it adapting to the demands of a market that is dwindling. Further, it inculcates no more today than it did in the past an ethic of public service in those study orientations that theoretically lead to positions in the public service administrative interface (such as medicine, social sciences, and law).

Finally, nothing is accomplished by promoting an "endogenisation" of the University of Lubumbashi (Devisch 1999). In fact, it is already "endogenised" if one defines "endogenisation" as an accumulative historical process that includes the determining influence of colonisation. In so far as tradition is defined as "that which from the past persists in the present where it is transmitted

and remains an influence on and accepted by those who receive it, and who, in their turn, transmit it from generation to generation" (Pouillon 1991, 710-12), the African university is traditional. The "culture" that colonisation brought to Africa is not a prickly coat that one can put on and take off according to the weather; instead, it has been "appropriated," "reinvented," and partly "incorporated." Without grasping this, we cannot understand the sense in which students, families, university teachers, and local authorities understand the survival of the university system in Africa.

Notes

- 1 This article presents evidence from a five-month study, carried out in 2001. Financed by the *Coopération Universitaire au Développement* (Belgium), it focuses on the socioprofessional trajectories of students who graduated from the UNILU in 1997 and 1998. I would like to thank Pierre Petit, Marc-Eric Gruénais, Yann Lebeau, and Theodore Trefon for their useful comments on earlier drafts.
- 2 By contrast, employment in the private sector rose during the same period from 764 600 to 812 600, while real income increased from an index of 43.4 in 1980 to 111.2 in 1989 (De Herdt et Marysse 1996, 61).
- 3 Katanga is the province of which Lubumbashi is the capital town.
- 4 To understand the importance of the impact of this bankruptcy on the current national economic situation, it should be pointed out that, at the end of the 1980s, sixty-five percent of state foreign currency came from copper. Moreover, the *Gécamines* had more than 24 000 workers until 2003, for the most part located in Lubumbashi, Likasi, and Kolwezi.
- 5 *Ku-vimba* means "to swell" in Kiswahili: the dough of this flour, imported from Zambia, increases in volume. Consumed during the first part of the 1990s, the flour was also called *Choco*, due to its brownish colour, resembling chocolate.
- 6 In contrast to its usual meaning, the term "crisis" refers in the Congo to a long period of time: the crisis no longer refers to the present economic situation, but to an underlying structural crisis. This idea thus gave rise to the neologism *criseur* (crisis-coper), a synonym for "someone who is resourceful."
- 7 The number of students attending the university extensions at Katanga (Kolwezi, Likasa, Kamina) and at Kasai (Kabinda and Mbuji Mayi) is about four thousand. The extension of Kindu, in Maniema, cannot currently be used because of the war. The university does not have up-to-date detailed statistics. This explains the approximate nature of the figures cited, as well as the absence of data on the characteristics of the student population (such as age, gender, and failure rate).
- 8 As in Belgium, the school curriculum runs in two cycles of six years, the primary and secondary cycles.

⁹ All first names used are pseudonyms.

¹⁰ *Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution* is the state party founded by Mobutu.

¹¹ The prestige of the degree as a social differentiator today concerns both the town and the village (Rubbers 2000). Beyond this spatial demarcation, it distinguishes between "those who have studied" and "those who have not studied."

¹² Originally from a province associated with fervent Scheutist evangelisation, the Kasaians played a role in the colonial enterprise from 1910 onwards, and in even greater numbers after their region was opened up by railway in 1928. The integration of the Lamba into urban life, by contrast, was slow and difficult. In a way, they paid the price for the establishment of Elizabethville (Lubumbashi): they occupied the immediate hinterland, thus finding themselves caught between the demand for food crops and the forced recruitment of labour.

¹³ Three private universities offer training in medicine: the Catholic University of Bukavu, the Kongo University, and the University of Mbuji Mayi. For the moment, the Congolese Medical Association does not recognise doctors who are graduates from these institutions.

¹⁴ As Ranger reminds us, the "European way of life" in Africa was different from that in the home country to the extent that it was influenced by an "invented tradition," which led members of colonial society to think of themselves as a kind of aristocracy (Ranger 1992, 211-62).

¹⁵ Petit et Kabamba (2000) have dedicated a long report to the students at the University of Lubumbashi. This section on the students' study conditions is based partly on this document and partly on the fifty-three interviews carried out with graduates in social sciences, engineering sciences, and medicine by J.-P. Kalembwe, J. Kalonji, and myself.

¹⁶ Although it is no longer organised by a student committee, this probably comes from a tradition begun during the first few years of the colonial university. As probable evidence of this is the observation that the terms used to denote the new students and the older students are identical to those used in Belgian student folklore: the *boulets* and the *boulettes* (Swahilised terms for *bleus* and *bleuettes* — freshers) are *bleuzis* (turned blue) by the *poils* and *plumes*.

¹⁷ In the upheavals of the beginning of the 1990s, only two buses served the campus of Kassapa, while the ill-equipped buildings (no electricity, running water, toilets, laboratories, or benches) were being used by four times the number of students (four thousand people) for which they were designed when they were constructed.

¹⁸ In addition, this presumption has sometimes been confirmed at public conferences during which former students have admitted having attended such lodges in the past.

¹⁹ It is clear that these comments on the student condition as a long ordeal on the margins of society legitimise a change in social status, masking, at the same time, the diversity of individual situations in which university

studies are actually carried out (Bourdieu et Passeron 1964, 47-48). However, what interests us here is not the way in which an institution affects the daily routine of a collectivity, but the meaning accorded to the curriculum in higher education, resulting from the embeddedness of the university within the local urban society.

20 The civil servants are paid by those who require their services and according to the service given, rather than monthly by the state.

21 In 1999, the *Gécaminés* made at least seven thousand workers technically unemployed for an indefinite period, and in 2003, with the support of the World Bank, it set up a programme of voluntary redundancies for about 9 800 workers — out of a total of more or less 24 000. These redundant workers have reduced even more the chances of an opening for young engineers, to the extent that they can benefit from their long experience in order to obtain new employment with other employers in the region.

22 As is observed by MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga,

Colonization, which based local politics on the assimilation of elites into colonial society through education, made trade a dishonourable occupation. The valued profession was the civil service.... The conversion of the educated into traders is always a difficult experience which is often represented as temporary (2000, 10).

23 It can be considered that the UNILU has become "entrepreneurial," provided that this is understood in the sense of "public": it is managed as a public company, within a patrimonial framework, and not as a private company, as it does not reinvest the money it generates into the development of the institution itself so as to be profitable.

24 This interpretation allows us to understand better why university education is still considered to be "elitist" even though student numbers are rising, and why research is becoming "applied" even though education remains strictly "academic." It is what the teachers and the students demand: they are all too aware of both the current conditions of the transmission of knowledge and the usefulness of the degree, but still want to continue to benefit from an academic, abstract education, this being the feature that distinguishes the elite of "intellectuals."

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