

‘MOBUTU’S GHOST’: MOBILIZING AGAINST FOREIGN RETAILERS IN CONTEMPORARY CONGO

Aurelia Segatti

INTRODUCTION

Calls for protectionist measures and reserved access to retail for nationals, which derive from early independence attempts at indigenizing economies, have become a recurrent pattern of postcolonial African societies, particularly in times of crisis (Beveridge 1974; 1991; Peil 1971; Rood 1976). While countries as diverse as Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Zaire and Zambia all developed such policies in the early days of their independence, a more recent wave of protectionism over retail has affected Côte d’Ivoire (Brédéloup 2003), Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), among others.

In some instances, these mobilizations have led to threats, physical abuse, looting and, at times, individual or collective killings. In South Africa, the situation of Somali traders and the mobilization of the Greater Gauteng Business Forum, an openly xenophobic local business owners’ association, are a case in point (Gastrow and Amit 2013; Segatti 2011). Another example is the recent use of the Ghana Investment Promotion Commission Act of 1994 by the Ghanaian government to remove Nigerian and Chinese retailers after a period of grace that expired in October 2012 (Owusu 2012). In the DRC, while foreigners’ exclusion from retail and petty trade dates back to 1973 with Mobutu’s ‘Zaireanization’ policy, legislation had largely become obsolete, particularly in the troubled period of the 1990s and early 2000s. This was the situation until a new wave of mobilization among unions of Congolese traders led to its reactivation and to negotiations related to its implementation in 2011.

However, there are several substantive differences compared with the early independence era. The circulation of goods and people globally and regionally has increased sharply. Even if often toothless, regional economic communities (RECs) are now offering some regulatory frameworks in addition to those of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Historical communities of West African foreign traders have been joined by other trade diasporas from the Middle East and Asia. And finally, while states remain central in implementing protectionist policies, private sector groups of actors are now at the forefront of mobilizations.

AURELIA SEGATTI is currently a Labour Migration Expert with the International Labour Organization in Pretoria, South Africa. Prior to this, she was based at the African Centre for Migration & Society, Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand (Johannesburg) as Associate Professor, before becoming Research Manager at the Public Affairs Research Institute in the same university. Her research interests are migration policy, labour migration, xenophobic mobilization, economic indigenization and public administration.
Email: aurelias@pari.org.za

The recent Congolese mobilization lends itself well to a socio-political enquiry into the contemporary avatars of the indigenization discourse, the nature of its xenophobic undertones, and the social practices it gives rise to. But mobilization needs to be seen in Marx and Tilly's (1978) terms as guided by 'interests', and therefore analysed in terms of the dynamics of power redistribution that guide it. In particular, one underlying question is to ask whether this mobilization should be seen as yet another expression of dehistoricized anteriority (Bayart and Geschiere 2001) in a moment of identity and economic crisis, or, on the contrary, if it points to a repoliticization of economic spaces and to emerging political subjectivities in post-Mobutuist urban contexts. Based on extensive fieldwork, combining ethnographic research and interviews with key informants, conducted in Kinshasa between 2010 and 2012, this study focuses on mobilization techniques, the web of representations they give rise to, and political actors involved in or resisting the movement. It combines a socio-anthropology of places of coexistence based on participant observation in various markets (Central Market, Ziguida, Ngaba, Kato and its extension, and *Marché de la Liberté*) and in-depth thematic interviews in different languages with leaders of associations, migrant and local traders, and union activists, as well as targeted interviews with state actors and decision makers. The long period of time over which the research could be extended (thirty-six months in all) allowed for repeat visits to the same informants and a close monitoring of developments in mobilization patterns.

The paper first discusses the theoretical implications of focusing on mobilizations at the intersection of autochthony and economic indigenization. It then proceeds with an analysis of the complex type of nationalistic discourse mobilized in the Congolese case study and shows how it draws on both historical and contemporary global sources while also being influenced by Congo's ambivalent relationship to national identity and autochthony in the post-Mobutuist period. The non-distinct xenophobic undertones of the discourse, while mostly directed towards Asians and Lebanese, also result in the systematic targeting of business operators of West African descent, some of whose families have been settled in Congo for generations. The paper then interrogates the class dynamics at stake and provides a different reading of the mobilization in terms of (re)politicization of an emerging class of small entrepreneurs. In the last section, the paper then shows the multiple ways in which communities of foreign traders have organized and resisted restrictions on their business operations. In the context of continued negotiations since mid-2011, Kinshasa's tense, dense and heterogeneous markets continue to be places of 'composition' (Grafmeyer 1999) that are shared spaces, allowing for the relatively peaceful co-presence of nationals and foreigners in the context of the economy of reciprocity described by Trefon (2004). The implications of these findings are discussed in the conclusion.

AUTOCHTHONY, POSTCOLONIAL CITIZENSHIP AND THE INDIGENIZATION OF THE ECONOMY

While studies in the 1970s devoted attention to the rationales, the methods and the impacts of indigenization policies in different parts of the African continent

(see Peil 1971 on expulsions of aliens in West Africa; Beveridge 1974 on the Zambian nationalization of the economy; Rood 1976 on nationalization and indigenization in Africa; and Adedeji 1981), scholars then honed in on economic policies of indigenization in the 1990s (Beveridge 1991). A broad literature emerged on the South African version of indigenization, black economic empowerment (BEE), in the 1990s and 2000s (Southall 2007 among others), as well as on the Zimbabwean experiment, with a specific emphasis on land restitution. Yet few of these works, except perhaps Alden and Anseeuw (2009) and Southall's recent volume (2013), really explore in much depth the linkages between economic indigenization and the shaping of post-liberation citizenship. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh's account of capitalism and autochthony remains confined to Cameroon (2000).

While the literature on autochthony reviewed in the introduction to this issue has explored the role of economic inequalities in polarizing identities, it has mostly done so through the lens of land ownership and access to state services and benefits. Very seldom have studies of autochthony paid in-depth attention to the historical making of economic inequalities and their overlap with racial, ethnic and religious boundaries. This is perhaps because doing so concurrently requires us to think about autochthony as the assertion of a 'natural' right to make claims over a specific 'territory' and its 'resources', as Cutolo (2008) encourages us to do, mobilizing Foucauldian conceptual tools. This reading of autochthony as a form of 'governmentality' and 'biopolitics' offers the possibility of extending it beyond the realm of belonging and territory or space in which it is often confined, and of examining its intersection with economic activity and wealth appropriation.

As pointed out in the introduction to this special issue, too little is known about how differentiation on the basis of insider/outsider boundaries triggers new (or renewed) mobilization patterns and political subjectivities, or how it exacerbates class dynamics in postcolonial contexts of neoliberal governmentality. Following Cutolo and Geschiere (Cutolo 2008: 17), this paper looks at the intersection of these dimensions to understand the specificities and historicity of local and national arrangements. In particular, the paper draws on its empirical findings to document instances when autochthony continues to naturalize and dehistoricize power relations and instances when, on the contrary, it repoliticizes local forms of governmentality.

The Congolese case study

Current mobilization patterns calling for foreigners' exclusion from retail in Congo, the discourses they give rise to, and the kind of political subjectivity they express are multi-dimensional. They are only one development in a long history of Congolese mobilizations (Nzongolo-Ntalaja 2002). While mobilizations on similar grounds have sparked much violence in other settings (South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria), so far the Congolese movement has been met with circumspection and passive and active resistance by both target populations and locals. While Congolese 'hospitality' and 'friendliness' as well as Kinshasa's 'cosmopolitanism' are often romanticized (Trefon 2004), little is known of the actual mechanisms behind the dominant 'peaceful coexistence' that prevails across markets.

As ‘places of composition’ (Grafmeyer 1999) governed by their own rules, Congolese markets thus far have offered structural resistance to the autochthony discourse: calls for strikes have been followed unevenly; foreign traders continue to operate openly; and multiple waivers have been granted allowing them to trade legally in many products. Instances of racketeering and harassment have been reported but have remained fairly localized and are hard to distinguish from everyday *tracasseries*, the routine harassment of all (Congolese and foreign) traders by state representatives in search of easy cash. Kinshasa’s markets are more than mere fresh produce markets. They reflect a long history of contradicted planning by colonial and postcolonial authorities and the claiming back of the urban space by a range of social actors (Beeckmans 2009). Markets are increasingly vital to the urban economy of a capital city almost entirely devoid of employment in industry and with limited ‘modern’ retail structures, and they are also a source of direct income for state authorities through taxation. Although they are officially accountable to the municipality, markets are in fact under the ‘protection’ of different state structures, from the presidency, as in the case of the *Marché de la Liberté* – a ‘gift’ from Laurent-Désiré Kabila to Masina’s inhabitants in recognition of their loyalty to his regime in 1998 – to the city’s governor, district mayors (*bourgmestres*), and at times district military officials. As fragile as markets may be as institutions, an understanding of the structural mechanisms they offer in terms of mobilization and resistance is fundamental to grasp not only the nature and potential of the autochthony discourse in Congo, but also the class interests and dynamics that underpin these mobilizations (Péraldi 2001). This study is therefore an attempt to respond to the following questions:

- Who are the main actors in these mobilizations? What is their political and socio-economic profile?
- How have they managed to mobilize? On what scale and through which networks? What are the discursive patterns on which they rely?
- What sort of political subjects emerge from these mobilizations, both within and in opposition to them? Whose key interests do they protect, consciously and unconsciously?

THE CURRENT MOBILIZATION AS A CONTINUATION OF MOBUTUIST INDIGENIZATION RHETORIC

The first striking element in discourses proffered by unionists and state officials was the filiation, legal and symbolic, established with the indigenization rhetoric of the Mobutu era. While present in actors’ narratives, this legacy was also constantly transformed and reinterpreted, and so a full understanding of the arguments requires a degree of historical knowledge.

The 1973 ‘Zaireanization’ reform: returning economic assets to the ‘sons of the country’

In the 1960s, the Mobutu regime started to consider changes to the ownership structure of key economic assets in order to limit its dependency on the former colonial power, Belgium, whose interests had remained largely dominant across

all sectors. In 1966, the Bakajika Act (7 June 1966) imposed a requirement for companies to be registered in Zaire. This resulted in the nationalization of land and minerals rights. The vote for the Act gave rise to a political debate that intensified as Zaire embarked on a firmer policy of 'authenticity' from 1971 (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 717). On 30 November 1973, 'Zaireanization' was imposed by decree (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997). As Braeckman showed, this policy was intended to create a national bourgeoisie – a 'middle class', to use Mobutu's own words – that would lift the whole country out of poverty and underdevelopment (Braeckman 1991: 157). Zaireanization was also part of Mobutu's *rapprochement* strategy vis-à-vis the Eastern bloc (China and North Korea) and among non-aligned countries in the Third World (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 693). In addition to the nationalization of land, which implied that all businesses such as plantations, cattle and poultry farms, fisheries and quarries became state properties, it was decided that petty trade could be carried out only by nationals. However, the unpreparedness of the reform and the predatory appetite of the new political leadership soon drove down the newly nationalized firms. Dispossessed economic operators sometimes resorted to scorched earth tactics. Instead of abandoning the reform, it was in fact intensified in 1974 with 'radicalization', which consisted of the appointment of state directors as chairmen of the nationalized businesses. The systematic plundering of finances resulted in numerous bankruptcies. This was then followed by the dismantling and destruction of productive capacities. Investors became more and more suspicious, and massive capital flight also resulted from the policy. In particular, small-scale traders, from Portugal, Pakistan and Greece, were affected and decided to withdraw en masse from the rural areas, thus depriving Congolese populations of basic products (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 719). As Young and Turner (1985) noted, 'what transpired was a tumultuous, disorderly and profoundly demeaning scramble for the loot'.

In spite of the economic disaster Zaireanization fostered, which Mobutu himself acknowledged and tried to mitigate with the creation of a stabilization committee in 1975, the 1973 reform continued to inform the Congolese economic landscape for many more decades. First, it legally formalized the relationship between colonial theft and the justification for repossession. Second, it rooted the legitimacy of repossession in the notion of autochthony, through concepts such as 'sons of the land' or 'return to the land'. Third, it conditioned, even if only symbolically, the country's access to modernity to the expulsion of foreign interests and the emergence of a Congolese 'middle class'. And yet, ironically, in focusing on colonial and foreign interests (fourth), it managed to distract attention away from the profound clash of class interests between the predatory political leadership and the impoverished rural and urban masses on which Zaireanization was in fact based. Precisely because it solely served the interests of Mobutuists (and those of large foreign corporations that were soon back in business) (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 719) – and, for that matter, it did not rely on any long-term economic strategy – the reform precluded the emergence of the said 'middle class'. In particular, the incorporation of petty trade in the Zaireanization reform served as a smokescreen concealing the strong class interests that underpinned the bulk of the reform. These key structural aspects and the memory of the failed reform have continued to shape mobilizations and to inform the indigenization of trade until the present day.

The collapse of state regulatory power in the 1990s and the protracted war situation from 1997 onwards coincided with a system of inconsistent regulation of petty trade across the country. Such trade was administered mainly at the discretion of the most powerful authorities of the moment and was a source of micro-local rent. With the gradual reopening of the country, the change in alliances following the demise of the Mobutuist regime in 1997, and the subsequent installation of the Kabilas, new migrant trade networks settled in the country from across the world, specializing in specific products or value chains (Segatti 2015). Alongside older generation West African, Lebanese and Indian operators, who settled in Congo decades ago, Kinshasa is now home to a great diversity of business people. These come from China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Turkey, Nigeria, South Africa and other Lebanese communities (who are now mostly Muslim, as opposed to the former Christian Lebanese migrants). With the almost complete collapse of domestic agricultural and industrial production in the 1990s, imports became a monopoly game between a few large foreign operators organized by sector and product. De facto monopolies over the import of specific products created monopolies over the entire retail chain across the country. Despite harsh and highly uncertain conditions, prospects of high returns on investments led to the settlement of numerous smaller operators (Vircoulon 2007). Most of the time, these smaller operators are directly linked to the larger importers through family or ethnic ties. This is the context in which discontent among Congolese petty traders began to grow and resulted in the emergence of coordinated protest action.

Even though some actors refer to some form of mobilization in 2001, it was only in 2011 that attempts at organizing retailers around indigenization materialized. On 26 July 2011, a march was planned at the behest of several unions of retailers under the leadership of the Syndicat National des Vendeurs du Congo (SNVC – National Union of Congolese Retailers). Their main demand was the implementation of the restriction guaranteed under the 1973 Act. This led to the signing of a decree in October 2011 (Décret 011/37 of 11 October 2011) by the national Minister of the Economy. There was, however, no sign of implementation by the end of 2011, so the unions called for a second march to be held on 10 January 2012. A long negotiation process ensued, during which unions, associations of foreign retailers, larger federations of employers and governments negotiated product by product; a final agreement was reached by the end of 2012. Officially, retail and petty trade are reserved to nationals. However, in practice, the waivers included in the final declaration and the attached list of waived items (*nomenclature*) ensure that foreign operators retain specific rights relating to retail sub-sectors. The specifics of the *nomenclature* are also such that, practically, it would be extremely complex for government to enforce the decree.

Notwithstanding these various factors, the discourses that were crafted throughout the mobilization and negotiation processes provide a fertile lens through which to view this attempt at re-indigenizing the economy from below.

Patterns of contemporary indigenization discourses in the Congo

... Chinese and Indian suppliers are pursuing us in the Democratic Congo to unfairly compete in the exercise of petty trade selling wholesale, semi-wholesale, or retail goods, under the label of investors, while they unduly take advantage of the Congolese

code of investment. This is something we can no longer tolerate, enough is enough ...

They are of course the producers. But it is the African mamas who make use of the fabrics. Their wives don't wear them ... Far from us the idea of standing against our Chinese and Indian partner friends whose technical know-how of the '5 *chantiers*' and the revolution of modernity¹ can no longer be demonstrated. However, they could be more useful elsewhere ...

To the President of the Republic, our thanks for his patriotism and commitment to safeguarding the supreme interest of the Congolese people in its territorial integrity, in order to trigger the birth of the middle class of Congolese entrepreneurs.²

The excerpt above is taken from a memo addressed by one of the unions to the Minister of the Economy at the height of the negotiations. It encapsulates a number of the key discursive patterns, understood as a range of themes and metaphors providing certain representations of social reality identified in the mobilization. The paper now delves into an analysis of the combination of tropes encountered in these enunciations on an initial reading.

Most discussions and statements on the 2011 mobilization systematically drew on the claims' legal roots in the 1973 and 1979 Acts. The root of the current situation in the law, despite the abysmal failure of Zaireanization, which has been acknowledged and denounced, was a strong indication of its legitimacy. For many, imbued with the deeply rooted positivist legal culture that dominates any understanding of the law in Congo, the simple stringent implementation of the legal Acts might have been enough.

The indigenization of the economy is also linked to legal legitimacy, but is more openly rooted in the history of the country. The rationale here is ambivalent in many respects. Firstly, while it claims some derivation from the Mobutu era, it also understates its overall economic failure and legacy, particularly in terms of its class implications. Secondly, the rationale constantly refers to a heterogeneous mix of pseudo-Marxist, developmental rhetoric around the need to protect infant industries, while being disconnected from current global debates. Therefore, while there are connections between the retail indigenization discourses and anti-liberalization/pro-industry global developmental discourses, their shaping in Congo draws on an eclectic mix of 1960s and current global ideas, mostly relayed by media sources. In addition, there is a clear surrender of industrial policy to foreign expertise.³ Prompted to explain this rather resigned position regarding the industrial sector and wholesale trade, informants often talked about the systematic destruction of production capacities and the discouragement of Congolese industrial entrepreneurship over the past three decades, as well as the creation of cartels and monopolies

¹'5 *chantiers*' and the revolution of modernity are the successive developmental policies adopted by the Congolese government since 2006. While they consisted officially in developing water sanitation, electricity, basic healthcare, education and infrastructure, only the latter has seen concrete improvements (roads).

²Memo from the Association des Femmes Commerçantes et Navigantes (AFCONA – Association of Female Business Operators and River Traders), 2012. Translated from the French by the author.

³*Ibid.*

on basic staples (rice, batteries, bread, etc.) by large foreign groups in cahoots with Congolese authorities.⁴

Thirdly, excluding foreigners from trade encapsulates a strong sense of territorial 'reconquest' within the urban space. Union leaders, who paid little attention to the historicity of street trade in Kinshasa, insisted on the importance of spatial occupation of the streets. 'All expatriates must leave the streets, they must sell in warehouses. Places and spaces are at stake. If our government acted responsibly, they [expatriates] should have been cleared of these spaces,' summarized one trade unionist.⁵

Fourthly, and notwithstanding recurrent generalizations about foreigners ('expatriates'), interviewees vigorously condemned xenophobia and racism. Without being prompted, most interviewees insisted on distinguishing the current Congolese mobilization from other continental outbursts of xenophobic violence. For those representing Congolese traders' interests, their struggle is very distinct, precisely because of the legal and economic rationales. Guylain Lokofu-Longanga, the General Secretary of the SNVC, insisted:

We are hospitable and peaceful but people who've been welcomed by us take advantage of our good faith. We're not here to beat them up. Let them respect our laws. It is unfair that they have privileges.⁶

Other, less allowable, means of exerting pressure on foreign traders, such as intimidation, racketeering and violence, were concealed and denied by actors interviewed; this is a major difference compared with, for instance, the South African situation, where taking the law into one's own hands, or what analysts have termed 'insurgent citizenship', is considered legitimate, both historically and in the current context (see Monson 2012; Monson, this issue).

Paradoxically, despite this vigorous condemnation of xenophobic violence and racism, Congolese discourses on the indigenization of retail are replete with xenophobic undertones, which give shape to a specific type of autochthonous debate. Claims almost classically relied on ahistorical reconstructions of the 'Congolese people' as the 'sons of the land'. The rallying cries of one of the main unions, for instance, made explicit reference to the 'sons of the country' (*Bana mboka*) and the repossession of the land (*Congo na biso*: our Congo) (the SNVC at a rally on 17 November 2012). Notions of unity, territory and filiation were mobilized regularly, all geared towards emphasizing the legitimacy of autochthonous populations. In private, Rwandans were also identified as a homogeneous inimical grouping, although they are marginal in the Kinshasa retail sector. However, a closer examination of the dynamics of mobilization revealed extreme ethnic and political tensions among trade unionists (as discussed in the next section). Yet this was not what was foregrounded in statements: Congolese identity was presented uncritically as a unified whole.

⁴Interview with S. Mutombo, 11 September 2012. Some interviewees' names have been modified.

⁵Interview with G. A. Tshimanga-Lutumba, 11 September 2012.

⁶Interview with G. Lokofu-Longanga, 14 September 2012.

The second feature of these xenophobic undertones was the invariable construction of Congolese people, and particularly small entrepreneurs, as victims – victims of colonization, Zaireanization, wicked expatriates, and the complicity of past and current authorities. Trade was also seen very much as emblematic of Congolese men's masculinity and their ability to put bread on the tables of their families. Notions of betrayal, humiliation and relegation to the rank of secondary citizen were commonly raised, often taking on implicit sexual connotations: 'The liberty we give them, they turn it into *libertinage*.'⁷ Guylain Lokofo-Longanga from the SNVC commented: 'They have lots of money with which they manipulate our government. Damso is a Belgian subject in the fish import business. Well, the government kneels before him.'⁸

Last but not least is how those discourses are reshaping the figure of the foreigner in relation to Congolese history and current dynamics around citizenship. Particularly striking is the use of homogeneous terms such as 'expatriates' or 'foreigners', not only lumping together populations of diverse national origins and with distinct histories of migration to Congo, but also blurring class divides and positions in economic processes. While 'expatriates' used to refer to Western employees, particularly of donors, who would move to Congo on fixed-term positions of a few years, it has now come to denominate all foreigners, including self-employed West Africans or Lebanese. It was in the interstices of interviews and conversations that xenophobic prejudice and a propensity to generalize surfaced more openly:

Today, many stalls are run by Lebanese, Indians, Chinese and certain Asian races. Well, you can't distinguish them.⁹

In the memo, we asked for the law to be implemented, for retail to be returned to us. Because we were invaded by the Chinese, the West Africans, the Indians.¹⁰

It is, of course, essential to view these generalizations in relation to the various frustrations explored previously to represent them in their full complexity and depth. Interviews thus reflected a constant tension. While the legitimacy of the Congolese's sense of deprivation was built on historical legacies going back to the colonial period, at the same time the historicity of migration to Congo was deliberately ignored, in spite of sophisticated or even intimate knowledge of communities of 'expatriates' among Congolese mobilizers.

This opposition between 'us' and 'them' in the trade sector was my initial entry point in understanding the mobilization. However, a second reading revealed to me yet another dimension. As my interviewees and I became better acquainted, and after more time spent in the depths of the markets, it became apparent that entwined with the indigenization rhetoric lay an expression of political resistance and emerging class subjectivity.

⁷Interview with G. Diemo, 11 September 2012.

⁸Interview with G. Lokofo-Longanga, 14 September 2012.

⁹Interview with C. Kabesa, 13 November 2012.

¹⁰Interview with E. Kisangani-Siapata, 13 September 2012.

URBAN MOBILIZATION OF TRADERS AS AN EXPRESSION OF POLITICAL RESISTANCE AND EMERGING CLASS SUBJECTIVITY

Le marché, c'est nous, c'est nous! L'économie, c'est nous, c'est nous! La libération, c'est nous, c'est nous! (The market, it's us, it's us! The economy, it's us, it's us! Liberation, it's us, it's us!)¹¹

These are words chanted by members of the SNVC at a rally organized in November 2012 at the Marché de la Liberté – one of the largest markets in the eastern part of Kinshasa, in the district of Masina. This powerful assertion of the union's role in the economy and politics (*libération*) of the city encourages one to rethink indigenization discourse and mobilization in relation to two specific dimensions that I have left aside until now: the organization of the mobilization itself and what made it possible in the constrained Congolese context; and the underlying politics and class dynamics at play.

The revival of Congolese small- and medium-sized enterprises

Despite Nzongolo-Ntalaja's people's history of the Congo (2002), the history of Congolese unions is one that remains to be written. While some unions already existed in the years before independence, or were created immediately afterwards, most Congolese unions emerged as organized associations promoting the interests of specific categories of workers and students. While some were directly influenced by socialist and Marxist ideas, such as the Union Générale des Étudiants Congolais (UGEC) or the Fédération Générale des Travailleurs Kongolais (FGTK), others were influenced by Christian democratic ideas from Belgium, such as the Union des Travailleurs Congolais, the largest union at independence. The rise of the one-party system under Mobutu's Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution (MPR) led to the incorporation of these different unions into single organizations under the MPR. In 1967, workers' unions merged into the Union Nationale des Travailleurs Congolais, which later became the Union Nationale des Travailleurs Zaïrois. UGEC was merged into the Jeunesses du MPR in 1972. As far as employers' organizations were concerned, they emerged only in the 1970s, thanks to Mobutuist support. In 1972, on the basis of existing professional organizations and chambers of commerce, the regime established the Association nationale des entreprises du Zaïre (ANEZA) with national and regional offices, sector-based clusters and committees (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 720). Female traders, often close to government through their husbands, or themselves active politicians within the MPR, organized into various associations, the most powerful of which was the Association des femmes commerçantes du Zaïre (AFECOZA) (Ndaywel è Nziem 1997: 737).¹²

In the 1990s, other organizations were created targeting more specifically small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Confédération des Petites et Moyennes Entreprises du Congo (COPMECO) thus was created in 1991 to federate Congolese SMEs, on Mobutu's recommendation.¹³ Other organizations

¹¹Provincial president of the SNVC at a rally at Marché de la Liberté, 17 November 2012.

¹²Also, interview with E. Kisangani-Siapata, 13 September 2012.

¹³Interview with A. Muyenga-Muna, 19 November 2012.

already existed, such as the Union Nationale des PME, the Fédération Nationale des Petites Entreprises Congolaises (FENAPEC, which still operates) and the FEC PME, an offshoot of the powerful Fédération des Entreprises du Congo (FEC) (which represents the interests of large companies, and thus mostly foreign interests) but targeting SMEs.¹⁴ However, the COPMECO's current lack of funding and proximity to the FEC positions it at odds with the more recently created 'unions', as it defends the interests of SMEs and the range of informal occupations related to trade.

Interestingly, the initiative behind the 2011 mobilization stemmed from an alliance between a small group of new organizations created between the late 1990s and the late 2000s outside the framework described above. These organizations like to be seen as 'unions' (*syndicats*), in opposition to the *fédération* and *confédération* of the FEC and COPMECO, which they see as representing powerful multinational companies and larger SMEs rather than their constituencies. The lead organization, the SNVC, was created in October 1997. With 20,000 card-holding members in 2012, according to its national president, Guylain Lokofonganga,¹⁵ it organizes the 'informal sector' – bars, taverns, small shops, market stands, pharmacies, small hotels – as well as 'the most underprivileged', such as shoe polishers, cobblers and stone breakers.¹⁶ While it is present across five provinces (Kinshasa, Lower Congo, Western Kasai, Katanga and North Kivu), its stronghold is Kinshasa, where it is active in 123 markets, seventeen car parks and four ports. More recently established unions that took part in the mobilization included the Union pour le Développement des Commerçants Congolais (UDCC), founded in 2008 and about 4,800 members strong in 2012,¹⁷ and the Rassemblement National pour l'Epanouissement des Entreprises Congolaises (RANEECO), created in 2009 and with about the same membership as the UDCC.¹⁸

Distinct from these 'unions' due to its filiation with AFECOZA, but associated with the 2011 mobilization and the negotiations that ensued, is AFCONA; this was created in 2003 as a female business operators' and river traders' organization. Representing the interests of a historically rather wealthy, albeit recently impoverished, class of female operators in alliance with smaller cloth traders, it is currently headed by Elise Kisangani-Siapata, former secretary of the Kinshasa branch of AFECOZA in the 1980s.¹⁹ Finally, there is also a myriad of smaller, more localized or sector-specific organizations that are closely associated with the 2011 mobilization. While their exhaustive list cannot be established, two of the more powerful ones in terms of mobilization were the Chambre de Commerce Regroupement des Commerçants de Kato et son Extension (the Kato market association or CCR CKE) and the Association nationale des vendeurs d'oignons et de condiments (ANAVOC).

The 2011 mobilization reflects a rather unique moment of unity and solidarity between the three main organizations (SNVC, UDCC, RANEECO), some

¹⁴Interview with A. Muyenga-Muna, 19 November 2012.

¹⁵Interview with G. Lokofonganga, 14 September 2012.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Interview with R. Mutunda-Ntuta, 18 September 2012.

¹⁸Interview with Tshimanga-Lutumba, 11 September 2012.

¹⁹Interview with E. Kisangani-Siapata, 13 September 2012.

of their affiliates (CCR CKE, ANAVOC) and AFCONA, as reflected in the march and various memos sent to Prime Minister Ponyo and Minister of the Economy Nemoyatu.²⁰ Existing differences in constituencies, class, ethnic and political composition of the organizations resurfaced at a later stage in the mobilization. However, during the 2011 strikes and the march, and over the different rounds of negotiation that followed until the end of 2012, these various organizations continued to exert pressure on government in a fairly coordinated manner. This is notable enough in a country where sustained social mobilization has been almost systematically stifled, and particularly where class, ethnic and political alliances have almost always failed to persist over time (Nzongolo-Ntalaja 2002).

Markets and the political economy of Kinshasa

Understanding the dynamics of this specific mobilization also requires a closer look into the political economy of the city and province of Kinshasa and the role played by markets within it. A 2009–10 study of local governance in the city (Segatti and Tshibwabwa-Kuditshini 2012), which covered nineteen of the twenty-five districts, revealed how markets had become part of a complex web of localized rents irrigating the Congolese political class at different levels. While some of the markets are the *chasse gardée* of either the presidency (Marché de la Liberté) or the governorate (Marché Central), smaller markets fall under the ‘protection’ of local politicians, the police or military officials. The division of profits between the various stakeholders was confirmed by several interviewees.

While taxes collected in the markets may not be very substantial compared with other rents (mining or customs, for example), they are a regular (daily, in fact) source of flexible cash for the political elites and petty civil servants, and one that can easily remain unaccounted for. As most transactions continue to be handled in cash only and without any computerization, market rents can be highly sought after. Administrators’ positions are thus politically motivated and the exclusivity of market management can become a source of violent conflict. Such a conflict opposed, for instance, the district mayor of Matete and a local high-ranking police official in 2009.²¹

Control over the markets and the level of rent they generate thus represents leverage in negotiations with the political elite, whether at local or national level. In addition to the source of social unrest that market closures can cause in economies extremely reliant on the daily consumption of basic staples, closures also result in a direct loss of rent inflows, and thus have the potential to irritate their usual beneficiaries and at least attract their immediate attention. Commenting on this bargaining power, the president of the SNVC reflected: ‘We can paralyse the city ... Government did not really think we could paralyse the city.’²²

²⁰Interview with R. Mutunda-Ntita, 18 September 2012, Memo from AFCONA, 2012 and letter from CCR CKE, dated 2 August 2011 and addressed to the Prime Minister (N°. 055/CDICF/CCRCKE/011). Translated from the French by the author. Also, interview with G. Lokofo-Longanga, 14 September 2012.

²¹Interview with T. Gaibene, 11 August 2009.

²²Interview with G. Lokofo-Longanga, 14 September 2012.

More than a general protest against taxes and *tracasseries*, the indigenization agenda, because it cuts across existing divides and tensions among and between the organizations, represents a powerful way to test the actual leverage they have over the political elites at the local and national levels.

The mobilizing power of the indigenization agenda should also be seen in relation to the class dynamics it has been able to harness among these organizations. Common to the sociology of these unions is the bitterness of a class of ageing Congolese entrepreneurs who once managed flourishing businesses in the 1980s and were systematically impoverished by the country's various crises. Many of the organizers would, for instance, quantify their losses, comparing the number of shops they owned in the early 1990s with what they have now, with some having gone entirely bankrupt. While acknowledging the disastrous policies of the Mobutu era, most would also express a particular anger at the current alliance between the new political elites, from the eastern part of the country, and foreign interests, particularly Indian and Chinese – an alliance concluded at their expense through their exclusion from the urban rent-generating networks. Although they were especially careful in how they phrased it, they also linked more or less explicitly their current hardships to the influx of 'foreigners' triggered by the '5 *chantiers*' policy of President Kabila.

However, the resentment felt by members of the UDCC, RANEECO and AFCONA should not be confused with the discontent of the SNVC and smaller affiliates. While the former feel excluded from access to a larger share of economic profit, the latter are fighting for survival. This is at least what the SNVC claims to be doing. In asserting its ability to lead the pack and 'paralyse' the economy, the SNVC was in fact sending a message to both government and the other unions and claiming access to a larger share of the rents. The mobilization should therefore be seen as an alliance between two distinct classes of traders: former beneficiaries of the Mobutuist era impoverished over the past decade and incapable of withstanding the competition of foreign operators; and the '*petit peuple*' of street vendors, barely surviving on a few Congolese Francs a day in a jobless economy, but who, more than the other organizations, have the power to bring Kinshasa's markets to a standstill.

The apparent unity of purpose displayed by the organizations during mobilization and negotiations also concealed profound ethno-regional and political divides in addition to the class dynamics just described. As interviews were conducted, it became apparent that tensions existed between the SNVC on the one hand, and RANEECO, CCR CKE and, to a lesser extent, UDCC on the other. These tensions were related to the fact that RANEECO, CCR CKE and UDCC are dominated by the Luba-Kasai ethnic group, known for its prominence in business. Certain markets, or sections of the huge Marché Central and of the Kato market, are indeed dominated by business operators from that ethno-regional origin; other sections by the Banande, a group originally from the territories of Beni and Lubero in North Kivu; and yet other sections by West Africans.²³ The RANEECO leader, Tshimanga Lutumba, a Kasaian, openly admitted to these ethnic tensions and indicated that entering into an alliance with the SNVC, whose leader is not a Kasaian, was part of a calculation to

²³Interview with R. J. Gaye, 17 September 2012.

expand the basis of RANEECO and other affiliates beyond their Kasaian profile and historical political camp, that of the Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), the main opposition party led by Tshisekedi Wa Mulumba, himself a Kasaian.

At the organizational level, what emerges is a complex web of trade unions and associations fighting a broader struggle – the claiming back of political and economic space from the large multinationals and their main patron, the Congolese national and municipal political leadership and its rapacious rent-seeking systems. Because of its historical and legal origins, as well as in reaction to recent substantial and visible inflows of new migrants into Congo, the indigenization discourse offered unprecedented leverage to already existing organizations. The latter point distinguishes the Congolese case from situations where the indigenization agenda has triggered the creation of organizations. More than other demands, indigenization has had the ability to federate organizations across their specificities and divides and to strike a temporary alliance between two sub-classes of business operators that had never united previously. Above all, because of the tactical understanding of its leaders regarding the role played by market rents in the political economy of the capital city province, the mobilization managed to bring the authorities to the negotiating table. This confirms to a large extent the observation made by Englebert and Tull regarding negotiation being used as a mode of inclusion in political and economic redistributive processes, but also, paradoxically, contributing to the reproduction of the state, albeit often without any palpable outcome (2013: 7). From the perspective of these authors, it is therefore logical that the contestation of foreigners' presence in turn elicited counter-mobilization and resistance from the different associations of foreign traders present in Congo, both in the form of an active lobbying of the political sphere and in passive and quiet resistance to the closing of businesses within markets. These, the outcome of the negotiations and the resulting *modus vivendi* are now examined.

MARKETS AS 'PLACES OF COMPOSITION' AND RESILIENCE

After about three years of negotiations between the unions and government, what the coalition of Congolese traders' unions has achieved is unclear, proving Englebert and Tull right in asserting that negotiation is often an end in itself rather than a means to achieve outcomes (Englebert and Tull 2013). On the one hand, the unions succeeded in opening negotiations that included all major stakeholders. On the other, associations of foreign traders, as well as the powerful FEC, fought tooth and nail to defend their interests. They managed to secure waivers on about every product of interest to them. Implementation of the 2011 decree and the classification (*nomenclature*) is still ineffective. Major challenges stand in the way of systematic implementation: intergovernmental coordination, the absence of an implementation budget, and the multiple tactics adopted by groups of foreign traders to circumvent the decree. In late 2013, in most markets across Kinshasa, Congolese and foreign operators continued to trade side by side. Part of the explanation is that foreign operators organized in multiple ways to resist the unions' attempts to exclude them from retail and petty trade using a range of resources to claim political and economic space.

Organizing the resistance

West African migration to the DRC goes back to the early twentieth century with the import of labour for the construction of the Matadi railway (Segatti forthcoming).²⁴ Essentially composed of Malians and Guineans, some of whom remained and settled permanently in Congo, these pioneers were joined by Senegalese diamond traders (Brédeloup 1994). While few of them seem to have stayed on, except in the '*nganda ntaba*' business (goat meat taverns), a new wave of West African immigration, primarily from Nigeria but to a lesser extent from Liberia and Sierra Leone, started growing from the 1990s onwards. While Sarakolé Malians and Guineans continued to arrive or to move around Central Africa through kinship networks, tossed around the region as conflicts erupted (in Congo Brazzaville, Central African Republic and Eastern DRC), specialization in import chains, products and trade sectors became more pronounced; this was particularly visible in the city of Kinshasa.²⁵ Malians and Guineans now specialize in African fabrics, jewellery and small food and beverage businesses, located in markets (across the city but particularly in the *Marché Central* and *Kato*) and entertainment areas (such as *Mbandalungwa* and *Barumbu*); Nigerians occupy the electronics, music and auto spare parts sectors. This latter specialization proved particularly strategic, and offered leverage during the negotiations, in a city entirely reliant on second-hand cars in need of constant repair.²⁶

While there are no official statistics regarding each of these groups of West African nationals, a rough estimate of their presence in Kinshasa points to a few thousand per community. Interestingly, in spite of the limited support they receive from their countries of origin (except for Nigeria, perhaps), these groups are organized into national associations, which coalesced in 1986 into a single organization representing the interests of nationals from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).²⁷ This organization claimed a membership of about 30,000 to 35,000 members in 2012. Its representative, Roger Gaye, a Liberian national, who sat through all the rounds of negotiations, ensured that each category of products critical for the organization's various constituents received a waiver in the final classification of products reserved to Congolese nationals in the 2011 decree (the draft *Arrêté ministériel* of 2012).²⁸

Although organized, West Africans remained subject to harassment at the hands of the state and other groups of traders. Several interviewees noted the 'ethnic' fragmentation of markets between Baluba, Banande and West Africans.²⁹ In the words of Roger Gaye:

²⁴Also, interview with M. Marega, 8 December 2012.

²⁵Interviews with M. Haïdara, 20 November 2012, and M. Hamza, 8 December 2012. The author would like to thank Jacques Tshibwabwa-Kuditshini and Gilbert Mbuyamba from the Department of Political Science, University of Kinshasa, for having conducted those three interviews on her behalf. Also, interviews with M. Marega, 8 December 2012, and M. Thiam, 8 December 2012.

²⁶Interviews with E. V. Emeka, 14 September 2012, and U. Obiechina, 11 September 2012.

²⁷Interview with R. J. Gaye, 17 September 2012.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Interviews with R. J. Gaye, 17 September 2012, U. Obiechina, 11 September 2012, and Sako and Jérôme, 15 November 2012.

The market (Central and Kato) is dominated by the Baluba and they are in competition with West Africans. They think they can get rid of us. You see it's the union leaders, it's the market administrators. But some of us have been around for thirty or forty years. For some Malians, it's their home.³⁰

In general, representatives of associations and more established traders showed strong confidence in the continuation of their business operations and, more broadly, of their settlement in Congo. Mr Thiam, introduced to me as the descendant of an aristocratic family from Mali and a prominent businessman, owner of several shops and buildings, thus introduced himself:

I am Congolese. I was born in Kisangani in 1957, of a Malian father and a Congolese mother. My father was a trader and my paternal uncles too. My entire family is here in Congo, and it's here that I'll spend the rest of my life.³¹

The evasive Congolese state

The position of state authorities was characterized by a clear divide between the national and provincial levels on the one hand, and the local level on the other, more easily understood along political, ethnic and economic lines. It was clear from interviews with market administrators and from information collected about them from Congolese and foreign leaders that market administrators were by and large in favour of the mobilization. In one interview with the administrator of Marché Ngaba, the latter openly indicated that the SNVC worked 'in partnership' with the administrators and that he fully supported the city's implementation of a programme to expel hawkers operating along the main arteries, as the streets were 'flooded with our expatriate brothers who occupy many tables ... [It was necessary to] give a chance to our Congolese brothers.'³² This may have been paradoxical, given that administrators had everything to lose in terms of cash inflows and negative publicity regarding their ability to preserve social order within the markets. This nuances Englebert's study of the Congolese state's capacity to reproduce locally merely through fiscal rents (Englebert 2012). Symbolic rents, through ethnic ties, and straddling administrative positions and trade, also explained their sympathy for the mobilization. At national and provincial levels, unrest and the exclusion of foreign operators were seen as potentially very damaging in terms of partnerships with foreign investors and frustration of the executive; however, at the local level, there was support particularly for the SNVC.

Beyond these marked differences of opinion, what was particularly visible was the government's incapacity to take any action. Neither market administrators, nor provincial authorities in the Department of Economic Affairs, nor the national Ministry of the Economy and Trade, let alone immigration authorities, had any sense of the level of intergovernmental cooperation required at the end of 2012 to actually implement the decree. No budget had been allocated and no implementation plan discussed. Rather, market operators have redefined new

³⁰Interview with R. J. Gaye, 17 September 2012.

³¹Interview with M. Thiam, 8 December 2012.

³²Interview with A. Masamba, 12 September 2012.

rules and arrangements, and have reorganized accordingly, giving little purchase to the SNVC mobilization.

'Economy of reciprocity' and 'right to the city': redefining the contours of being Kinois

Trefon (2004), following De Villers (2002), characterized the nature of mutual help in Kinshasa as an 'economy of reciprocity' rather than solidarity among the poor. One of the questions left unanswered in existing analyses of Congolese urban transformation, however, is that of the mechanisms governing the historical condition of foreigners (Simmel 1908). While Trefon convincingly shows that overlapping and multiple identities are mobilized systematically to counter the negative effects of political oppression and state bureaucratic deficiency in social protection, and how being 'Kinois' has become a way of broadening one's opportunities (Trefon 2004), little is said about the way in which this applies to non-nationals. The relatively limited literature on migration to Congo (Kivilu Sabakinu 2004) does not really allow one to answer this question. The protracted tensions with Rwanda and Uganda in the eastern part of the country do not seem to have altered the nature of the 'Kinois' way of life towards an essentialization of positions on ethnic and national belonging. Chauvinistic assertions of Congolese nationalism against the Rwandan 'enemy' are heard regularly. Yet, unlike other countries facing comparable situations of extreme fragmentation and state withdrawal degenerating into civil conflict, Congo has thus far resisted a generalized ethnic strife. While Kinshasa has gone through unprecedented demographic change over the past two decades as a result of internal displacement, migration and international inflows, it has also been mostly devoid of major civil violence, except for the 1998 Tutsi rout, which was specific to a context of war and siege.

In addition, while the Congolese state has retained relatively strong coercive powers in the capital city, mostly as a result of the need to secure access to rent, donors and political power, its socio-economic role, as seen in this paper and in the works of others, is limited despite being constantly reproduced, as is underscored by Englebert and Tull (2013: 9). The analyst is therefore left with a conundrum: what explains the ability of the foreign operators and state actors to maintain 'compromise' and 'peaceful coexistence' (Grafmeyer 1999) and to oppose attempts to exclude foreigners even from legitimate spaces, such as those defined by legislators, in the absence of coercive state might?

Counterintuitively, rather than being exclusionary, ethnicity, the villagization of Kinshasa (Devisch 1996), representation and class differentiation all mediated the ability of foreigners to either assimilate into the Kinois social fabric or seek durable protection. This is not contradictory: in the presence of a mostly authoritarian and rent-extracting state, Kinois have been multiplying their networks and identities in order to maximize their ability to resist oppression, extortion and arbitrariness (Trefon 2004: 17). These attributes (ethnicity, villagization, representation, class differentiation), along with others (religion, profession, etc.), constitute some of the key entry points into the city's social, political and economic fabric, whether for *mbokatiers* (villagers from rural areas), *hapaya* (strangers) or *baexpat* (expatriates).

In our case study, the exclusionary logic of the SNVC, without passing judgement on the validity of its claims, was resisted in different ways by targeted

traders. First and foremost, perhaps, some traders opted for passive resistance in the form of refusals to obey closing orders, strikes, etc., knowing that market administrators would favour a 'soft' approach to ensure social order rather than risk more disruptive implementation through coercion, thereby risking looting.³³ These strategies of invisibilization were not possible for all foreign traders but only for those whose command of Lingala, the lingua franca in Kinshasa, was good enough, whose 'ethnic' origin may have been mixed, whose settlement in Congo went back decades, or who had become Congolese citizens.³⁴ Those who opted for invisibility and ignored orders were mainly Malians, Guineans and Senegalese, whose status, as perceived by their Congolese counterparts in the markets, is akin to that of the 'ethnic groups from within' described by Kivilu Sabakinu (2004) in relation to Bazombo (Angolan migrants to Congo). Secondly, many foreign operators were also confident that they could rely on the multiple micro-arrangements or compromises identified by Grafmeyer (1999) in his study of French markets in immigrant neighbourhoods. Through a variety of daily transactions with their Congolese counterparts they could continue operating almost normally during the strike days and secure their businesses locally. Their 'embeddedness' in the micro-economy of a specific market or neighbourhood (or village, as Devisch calls them), their knowledge of the 'systems' (trade networks, policing, taxation, racketeering, immigration), and 'faith' in their ability to manoeuvre were thus their best forms of protection. Thirdly, the most prominent foreign operators sought legal protection of their long-term business interests through representation by the various national associations, including the Union des Ressortissants de la CEDEAO (UR CEDEAO or Association of ECOWAS Citizens) and the FEC for the bigger companies. Class differentiation – leading to invisibilization for some, and to representation and direct access to the state for others – thus played another very important part in asserting an individual's political and economic space and basic 'right to the city'.

While this is far from the original concept created by Lefebvre (1968) in terms of a claim for the radical transformation of urban social and spatial relations (Purcell 2002), it does point to some of the philosopher's key ideas on the right to the city. In a way, the multiple forms taken by the resilience and resistance of foreign operators to injunctions by the SNVC to exclude foreigners from economic spaces directly question national citizenship as the main basis for political and economic membership of the city of Kinshasa. These are not broad-based, highly publicized mobilizations, but mobilizations that nevertheless reshape the contours of what being a Kinois means.

CONCLUSION

The mobilization analysed in this paper is emblematic of the complexities attached to notions of the indigenization of economies in contemporary African contexts. A multidimensional reading of the mobilization, viewing it from the perspective of

³³Interview with C. Mombi, 12 September 2012.

³⁴Interview with M. Marega, 8 December 2012.

history, class and political economy, provides key insights. Firstly, current Congolese discourses on autochthony aim to achieve something important historically. In legitimizing a nationalist governmentality of urban economic spaces in a country where people have been treated like second-class citizens and strangers by their colonial and postcolonial masters, these discourses reassert a new postcolonial self, simultaneously independent of foreign hegemony and internal political domination.

This self-assertion from both external interests and internal domination can be fully understood only if one looks at the mobilization as also being symptomatic of the tensions relating to class transformation. The sociological composition of union networks reveals a politicized, albeit ethnically fragmented, urban lower middle class of small business operators, who increasingly resent the hijacking of trade-related rents by the new political elites and their allies – large foreign investors. While openly acknowledged and denounced by all informants, the sector-based monopolies and cartels orchestrated by these historical and more recently settled foreign groups in cahoots with Congolese authorities are seen by the trade unionists as too deeply entrenched to be fought against directly. The urban economic space, however, is viewed as a first step, a ‘low-hanging fruit’, in the process of re-indigenization of the Congolese economy.

While the discourses and claims made by these organizations repoliticize the urban space and claim some genealogy with historical attempts to protect the emergence of local entrepreneurs, at the same time and in doing so, they dehistoricize the presence and legitimacy of a range of other actors, particularly West African traders, some of whose families have been settled in Congo for over a century. While they deny that they do so, the leaders of the mobilization in fact contribute to promoting and reinforcing an exclusive understanding of post-Mobutuist citizenship by dehistoricizing the development of retail trade in Congo and conflating all foreigners into the category of ‘illegitimate strangers’ – a classless, faceless category. This is also symptomatic of the currently limited space for rethinking Congolese citizenship along inclusive, non-ethnic, non-nationalist lines in the Congolese political space (Dunn 2009).

Of particular interest are the multiple ways in which foreign operators have resisted their exclusion from the urban economic space. While collusion between Congolese authorities and large foreign groups has allowed the latter’s position to remain unchanged, the ability of smaller operators to ring-fence their own economic space within the city is testimony to the consolidation of a ‘right to the city’ that is not based on citizenship – although this right is precarious and under constant threat of being erased by looting and social disorder. This resistance from below reveals that the form of inclusiveness and conviviality of the Kinoin way of life, largely based on transactional solidarity or reciprocity, as described by De Villers (2002) and Trefon (2004), offers one alternative to transcend nationalist models of Congolese belonging.

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, several unions of Congolese retailers have demanded the implementation of a 1973 law forbidding foreigners from operating small businesses and limiting their access to retail. Seemingly similar mobilizations have been observed elsewhere in Africa (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa), but the Congolese situation remains undocumented to date. The current discursive patterns and social practices that have emerged from this mobilization call for a socio-political enquiry, interrogating their xenophobic undertones but also viewing them in relation to the distribution of power and emerging political subjectivities of post-Mobutuist urban contexts. Based on extensive fieldwork, combining ethnographic research with interviews with key informants, conducted in Kinshasa between 2010 and 2012, this study focuses on mobilization techniques, the web of representations they give rise to, and political actors involved in or resisting the movement. It reveals a complex type of nationalistic discourse that draws on historical and contemporary global sources, while also being influenced by Congo's ambivalent relationship to national identity in the post-Mobutuist period. The non-distinct xenophobic undertones of the discourse, while mostly directed towards Asians and Lebanese, also result in the systematic targeting of West African business operators. Yet, despite often xenophobic and virulent rhetoric, interactions between Congolese and foreign traders have mostly remained characterized by 'peaceful coexistence'. Those Congolese and foreigners who have chosen to resist injunctions to exclude the latter from economic spaces thus directly question national citizenship as the main basis for political and economic membership in the city of Kinshasa.

RÉSUMÉ

Depuis 2009, plusieurs syndicats de vendeurs congolais demandent la mise en application d'une loi de 1973 interdisant aux étrangers la pratique du petit commerce et limitant leur accès au commerce de détail. Des mobilisations en apparence similaires ont pu être observées ailleurs en Afrique (au Ghana, Kenya, Nigéria, et en Afrique du Sud) mais la situation congolaise n'a pas été étudiée jusqu'ici. Les formes discursives et les pratiques sociales qui ont émergé durant ces mobilisations se prêtent à une interrogation socio-politique de leurs sous-entendus xénophobes mais aussi des dynamiques de redistribution du pouvoir et des subjectivités politiques émergentes dans les contextes urbains post-Mobutistes. Fondée sur un long terrain combinant recherche ethnographique et entretiens avec des informateurs clés, à Kinshasa entre 2010 et 2012, cette étude s'intéresse

aux techniques de mobilisation, au réseau de représentations qu'elles suscitent, et aux acteurs politiques impliqués dans la mobilisation ou s'y opposant. L'étude dévoile un type complexe de discours nationaliste d'inspiration internationale à la fois historique et contemporaine, mais aussi influencé par la relation ambivalente du Congo à la question de l'identité nationale dans l'ère post-Mobutiste. L'amalgame xénophobe présent dans les discours de mobilisation, bien que s'adressant essentiellement aux Indiens et aux Libanais, aboutit aussi au ciblage systématique des opérateurs ouest africains. Cependant, en dépit d'une rhétorique souvent xénophobe et virulente, les interactions entre Congolais et vendeurs étrangers demeurent caractérisées par une forme de 'coexistence pacifique'. Ceux des Congolais et des étrangers qui ont préféré résister aux injonctions d'exclusion des étrangers des espaces économiques interrogent ainsi directement la nature de la nationalité comme base unique d'appartenance politique et économique à la ville de Kinshasa.