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Good government, democratisation and traditional African political philosophy: the example of the Kanyok of the Congo

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RURAL POLITICAL CULTURE AND DEMOCRACY

Over the last several decades, officials in both the public and private sectors have applied economic, military, cultural, academic and diplomatic tools to promote the spread of democratic pluralism in African and elsewhere. With the fall of Africa's most resilient tyrant, Mobutu Sese Seko, there is hope that even one of Africa's most troubled systems may be transformed into a state that reflects the will of the people and promotes the common good. Sober observers, however, remain pessimistic. Laurent Kabila's spotted record on human rights, his stubborn intolerance of political opposition, the challenging global economic and political environments, and the long history of bad government in Mobutu's Zaïre are obvious reasons for concern. Furthermore, the example of most other African states is not encouraging. With the exception of countries such as South Africa and Botswana, even the most tenuous democratic progress in Africa is often slowed, blocked or reversed.

Generally, blame for this state of affairs has been levelled against the African political elite, the burden of colonialism, or international political and economic pressures. Specifically, for the Congo, Mobutu's kleptocracy, Belgium's paternalism, America's backing of a friendly dictator and the World Bank's support for ill-advised 'development' schemes all have been criticised. While such reproaches may be well

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deserved, this article argues that it is important to ask if the persistent failure of democracy in the Congo as well as in other African states is also related to African political culture.[1]

The study of political culture in Africa is made difficult by the fact that political life in Africa is characterised by a remarkably varied mosaic of competing civic groups and ideologies. Naomi Chazan writes that instead of an identifiable political culture in any African nation there is a 'profusion of political outlooks and worldviews'.[2] In part these are derived from pre-colonial perspectives and institutions, in part from colonial structures and the struggle for independence, and in part from the efforts to build or resist the post-colonial state. Noting an additional complication, Chazan further contrasts the political culture nurtured in the rural areas and the political culture that has emerged in urban centres. Rural civil society and political culture tend to be more vertically organised. Households, kin groups, ethnic associations and traditional systems join people regardless of age, income, power, occupation, interest or educational level. Urban civil society and political culture are more likely to be marked by horizontal linkages fostered by occupational groups, voluntary service societies, recreational organisations and age or gender associations. The people in these contrasting cultures may be expected to think and behave differently.[3]

Much of the literature on popular political culture has dealt with urban areas. Nevertheless, there are compelling reasons – especially when contemplating the future of Congo – to give more serious attention to rural values and institutions. First, the political culture of Africa's cities sometimes tells us more about what Africans find distasteful than what political values they actually endorse. Because urban political culture is often a protest against the corruption, inefficiency and unresponsiveness of contemporary African regimes, it is risky to make predictions about what kind of systems and structures

[1] For a review of some of the most important literature see Pearl T. Robinson, 'Democratization: understanding the relationship between regime change and the culture of politics,' *African Studies Review* 33, 1 (1994), pp. 36–67. See also, Gerardo L. Mauck, 'Democratic transitions in comparative perspective,' *World Politics* (April 1994), pp. 355–75, and David Beetham, 'Problems of democratic consolidation', in Paul Gifford (ed.), *The Christian Churches and the Democratisation of Africa* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 61–73. For a good example of how religious values affect political behaviour, both at the popular and at the regime level, see Austin Metumara Ahanotu (ed.), *Religion, State and Society in Contemporary Africa: Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, Zaire and Mozambique* (Washington, DC, 1992).

[2] Naomi Chazan, 'Between liberalism and statism: African political cultures and democracy', in Larry Diamond (ed.), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder, CO, 1994), p. 60.

[3] Chazan, 'Between liberalism and statism', p. 94, fns 82 and 83.

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urban people will actually favour. It is far from certain that just because they complain about misappropriation, governmental lethargy or arrogance, their basic values will sustain an honest, efficient and responsive regime. The urban 'political culture of counterhegemony'[4] actually camouflages a fragile coalition of criticism made up of an undetermined number of true democrats, a great many social and economic malcontents, and a powerful handful of rival but often equally authoritarian and corrupt rulers-in-waiting. Thus, the abundant data measuring the negative values and attitudes of city folk can be deceptive because they often show what those people do not value rather than the type of system that they would support.

Second, and especially for the Congo, rural political culture has been and remains profoundly salient. In terms of demographics, about 60 per cent of the Congolese people are still rural villagers, and even a significant percentage of urban dwellers are first or second-generation migrants from the countryside. Furthermore, during times of unemployment, family crisis or ethnic conflict, many town people seek temporary refuge in their place of rural origin. Therefore, successful Congolese politicians will need to gain at least some of their support from people with strong ties to rural areas. And to win that support, those political figures will have to express their ideas in an idiom rural people understand and respect.

In terms of actual political power, the ideas and actions of rural people have been enormously important for every government in the Congo region since the time Leopold founded the Congo Free State. Although articulated by literate outsiders (missionaries, humanitarians and journalists) the discontent of the Free State's rural rubber collectors, porters and peasants was the major factor that forced Leopold II to relinquish control over his domain. And although more powerful and efficient than its predecessor, the Belgian Congo's colonial government faced periodic and serious challenges from the rural regions. In the years immediately following the transfer of authority from Leopold to Belgium, the colonial authorities continued to fight to subdue Congolese chiefs who struggled to retain the essentials of their traditional polities. In the 1920s Simon Kimbangu's preaching galvanised rural economic and social discontent into support for a millenarian movement that authorities in Leopoldville and Brussels feared might result in a general revolt against the colonial system. In 1931, the Pende revolt in the Kwango was based on the

[4] Ibid., pp. 82–3.

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desire to expel the Europeans and regain the riches they had stolen from the African ancestors. In the mid-1940s, Bushiri, a logging company labourer turned Kitawala prophet, mobilised thousands of people in Kivu who rallied to join his anti-government messianic kingdom. Although much of the internal anti-colonial pressure of the 1950s was urban based, the leaders of the anti-colonial movement drew heavily on rural ethnic sentiments. In the 1960s rural revolts – sometimes taking the form of jacqueries – erupted in almost every province and virtually destroyed the newly independent nation of the Congo. Although the Katanga secession movement – the most serious challenge to the central government – was eventually absorbed into a reconstituted Congolese state with Moise Tshombe as prime minister, even Tshombe stumbled when trying to control chronic rural opposition. The 1970s and 1980s witnessed revolts and ethnic conflicts drawing on the strength of rural loyalties and discontent. Paradoxically, to a large degree, Mobutu managed to extend his hold on power by fanning ethnic antipathies rooted in memories of rural origins and prejudices. Finally, in 1997, Laurent Kabila, whose political activities and followers were associated with the very remote sections of eastern Zaïre, mobilised an army of rural rebels who attacked and captured almost every important urban area in the country before launching a successful assault on Kinshasa itself. In the final weeks of Kabila's campaign, urban Zaïre passively waited and watched as rural Zaïre organised and supported a movement that ended the thirty-two-year reign of Mobutu Sese Seko.

If the Congo is to enter a more peaceful and democratic phase, Congolese political leaders seeking support for specific policies and programmes will need to take rural constituents and their values into account. Urban based political activists and officials trying to reach or mobilise rural areas will need to craft their communication and ideas to fit the expectations, aspirations and perspectives of people in the towns and villages scattered across the land. Furthermore, once in office, the behaviour of Congolese political leaders will be constrained, tolerated or encouraged by rural sensibilities and understandings regarding ethnicity, power, authority, integrity and accountability.

Clearly, rural attitudes and activities are important. Thus, while not denying the significance of the political values of the Congo's often-turbulent urban masses, this article focuses on rural political culture. The goal of this exercise is to understand something about the nature of rural political values and perspectives. Hopefully, this will provide a degree of insight into what kind of government system – good or bad – these values are most likely to support.

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In examining the culture of politics, the ultimate aim of social science is to link culture to causality. Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*,[5] explains the connection by asserting that a society's political practices are moulded by *habitus*, 'a system of dispositions' which is 'practiced, lived in and enacted'. This value system should not be regarded as immutable or timeless. Bourdieu suggests that rather than a mechanical, deterministic template imposed on political actors, *habitus* is a set of strategy-generating principles 'enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever changing situations'.[6] Larry Diamond agrees, saying that the 'dimensions of political culture are fairly "plastic" and can change quite dramatically in response to regime performance, historical experience and political socialisation'.[7]

Certainly, the *habitus* of the Congolese political elite influenced the way the old regime was established, operated and dismantled, and it will affect the prospects for establishing a new democratic system. Clearly the political culture of the suffering urban masses will be a significant factor as well. But, for democracy to be consolidated into a system strong enough to persist in the Congo, the values, beliefs and attitudes of the rural masses are also critical. Diamond asserts that to 'ignore the beliefs of the wider society is to fail to appreciate the considerable degree to which influence and pressure for action may flow from the bottom up, constraining elites and perhaps vitiating or undermining even their sincerely democratic inclinations'. 'Stable democracy', according to Diamond, 'requires a mass habituation to democratic values and orientations.'[8] Specifically, the perspectives of the people can lead them to provide or withdraw support for new democracies and prevent or hasten their erosion over time. Attitudes such as patience and trust allow decision makers more latitude to negotiate difficult economic and social challenges, low levels of mass support for democracy may force leaders to take unwise or precipitous action, and an uninformed or unduly self-seeking citizenry can allow politicians to misappropriate scarce resources and to escape critical evaluation. As the Congo struggles to re-emerge from its decades of travail, rural as well as urban attitudes must be taken into account by political scientists and politicians who wish to understand or govern this neglected and brutalised nation.

In the three decades since Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba first

[5] Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Cited in Robinson, 'Democratization', p. 52. The relation between popular values and political thought and behaviour at the elite level is not a new topic. Both Max Weber and Antonio Gramsci wrote about these linkages.

[6] Bourdieu, *Outline*, p. 72, cited in Robinson, 'Democratization', pp. 52–3.

[7] Diamond, *Political Culture*, p. 9.

[8] Ibid., p. 246.

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wrote their influential *The Civic Culture*,[9] scholars have identified clusters of beliefs and attitudes which seem to have the greatest impact on the functioning of democracy. In general, the civic values that sustain democracy are moderation, pragmatism, compromise, a high regard for individual rights, support for the community as a whole, a willingness to accept less than perfect solutions, and an inclination to play by the rules. Specific ideals supportive of democracy can be grouped into three categories: *values of stability* (trust, co-operation, loyalty to and affection for the system, and appropriate deference to authority); *values of tolerance* (fair play, liberty, esteem for human rights, and respect for a loyal opposition and conflicting viewpoints); and *values of accountability* (willingness to accept criticism, an ability to offer evaluation, and patience with less than ideal or delayed results and a desire for information).[10] Adherence to these values, at both the elite and the popular level, tends to sustain democracy and prevent the re-establishment of authoritarian, patrimonial or statist regimes which abuse power and practice political repression.

Although citizens express their political values through individual actions and personal statements, they also join together in the many institutions of civil society that occupy the space between the family and the state.[11] In general, scholars, politicians and pundits who favour democratisation equate the values of popular culture, especially when institutionalised in civil society, with positive civic virtues. In an era when many describe the state and the political elite as enemies of political, economic and cultural freedom, liberty and rectitude are thought to reside with the unfettered business, religious institution, club, neighbourhood, village, family or individual. While government is said to burden its subject-citizens with over-regulation, stifling taxation, ruinous entitlements and human rights abuses, an unleashed citizenry, it is claimed, would support a transparent and competitive

[9] Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, 1963).

[10] Although scholars have not developed a standardised approach to the topic of values, it seems useful to group the values into these three categories. For an excellent review of the various perspectives see 'Introduction: political culture and democracy', in Diamond, *Political Culture*, ch. 1, pp. 1–27.

[11] As Crawford Young notes, the distinctions among family, civil society and the state which seem relatively clear in Western societies may be much more blurred in Africa. Some may argue, in fact, that family and state occupy so much space in African societies that there is little room for civil society. Because this article looks at both civil society and broad political culture, locating the exact boundaries separating the three realms is not critical. See Crawford Young, 'In search of civil society,' in John W. Harbeson, David Rothchild and Naomi Chazan (eds.), *Civil Society and the State in Africa* (Boulder, CO, 1994), pp. 33–50.

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political process, generate significantly higher levels of wealth, and transform ethnic conflict into benign cultural pluralism. Even when describing individuals and civil society in corrupt and collapsing regimes, most analysts place the blame for decay on the state, not on the people organised into the many non-state formal and informal social structures. Indeed, the only real worries related to citizens and civil society seem to be about the extent of their injuries suffered at the hands of evil despots or unyielding bureaucrats. According to most thinkers, if the people and civil society can survive the agonies inflicted by the machinations and flailings of a dying state, a new (hopefully democratic) order will emerge. Thus, most scholars tend to view the people joined in civil society as potential saviours and not as culprits.

Looking at civil society (and presumably at the individuals within civil society), Robert Fatton, Jr has presented a more sober and realistic assessment of Africa's political landscape.[12] Not only does Fatton remind us that even the best civil society can never be expected to provide for the general welfare or become a substitute for government, he also notes that civil society 'is not always civil… (and) is replete with antinomies'.[13] Continuing, Fatton states that civil society 'is not the all-encompassing movement of popular empowerment and economic change portrayed in the reveling and exaggerated celebrations of its advocates. It is simply not a democratic deus ex machina.'[14] Fatton does not deny the positive aspects of civil values, but he tempers an overly optimistic view of the virtues of non-state structures and values. Undoubtedly, political progress in Africa will be linked to a revitalisation of civil society. But that path is not without pitfalls and hazards.

Understanding the path towards political progress will require research into the values and attitudes of ordinary people, rural as well as urban, who are key players in civil society. The difficulty posed by such research is compounded in non-democratic regimes or in emerging democracies where information is often more limited and more jealously guarded. Nevertheless, because of the contribution of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, ethno-musicology and religion, our knowledge of popular political culture is growing. In Africa, studies of religious rituals, political rallies, music groups and the popular press have contributed to an understanding of the political

[12] Robert Fatton, Jr, 'African in the age of democratization: the civic limitations of civil society', *African Studies Review* 38, 2 (September 1995), pp. 67–99. [13] Ibid., p. 71.
[14] Ibid., p. 72.

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culture of rural as well as of urban people.[15] Surprisingly, however, little use has been made of what could be the richest and most accurate repository of rural political attitudes, the myths and legends or oral traditions of Africa's many ethnic groups.[16] Such oral accounts, common to all parts of rural Africa, are largely collections of political observations that reflect the conventional wisdom or commonsense of a particular region or people. Highly stylised, these collections of stories and sayings are condensed renditions of popular political philosophy as it has developed over generations, and as it is imparted to people at all levels of rural society. Because the political philosophy contained in myths and legends carries the ancestral seal of approval and because it is associated with ethnic pride, the power of this particular cultural script for determining rural political behaviour is likely to be considerable.

Although some may argue that these ancient materials are esoteric, archaic and irrelevant, current investigation proves that traditional myths and legends have not been relegated to the African intellectual attic. For example, Pierre Petit, a University of Liège lecturer conducting research in Katanga (formerly Shaba), has discovered not only that Luba people vividly recall the tales of their heroic founder ancestor Ilunga Mbidi, but that they have adapted his legend so that it can be used as an explicit polemic about the nature of modern politics. Petit has learned that for contemporary Luba a traditional tale has become a natural vehicle for analysing and explaining their loss of power and wealth relative to that of urban Congo and of Europe.[17]

THE CULTURAL SCRIPT OF KANYOK MYTHS, LEGENDS AND RITUALS

Although eventually it will be possible to write a more generalised study of the popular African political philosophy contained in myths and legends, at the present time it is more responsible and prudent to begin with an analysis of the tales of individual ethnic groups. The

[15] See for example, Leonardo A. Villalón, 'Sufi rituals as rallies: religious ceremonies in the politics of Senegalese state–society relations', *Comparative Politics* (July 1994), pp. 415–37. See also William F. S. Miles, 'The rally as ritual: dramaturgical politics in Nigerian Hausaland', *Comparative Politics* (April 1989), pp. 323–38.

[16] Robinson notes that the cultural scripts that guide political behaviour are embodied in stories, myths, legends, songs and accounts of pivotal historical events, Robinson, 'Democratization', p. 53.

[17] Pierre Petit, 'The nature of power among the Luba of Katanga (Congo R.D.C.)', paper presented at the 1997 African Studies Association Annual Meeting in Columbus, Ohio.

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remainder of this article will focus on the political ideals of a representative Congolese group, the Kanyok of Eastern Kasai. As part of a larger Luba–Lunda cultural, political, and economic complex spreading across the southern savanna from Lake Tanganyika to the Atlantic Ocean, the Kanyok hold to political values and perspectives very similar to those of their rural neighbours and to immigrants gravitating to Congo's growing cities and towns. The Kanyok are a typical savanna people whose ethnic identity solidified in the seventeenth century, whose relatively small polity emerged during the eighteenth century, and whose state reached its apogee during the nineteenth century.[18] Along with other Congolese, many twentieth-century Kanyok people migrated to the large urban centres such as Kananga, Likasi or Lubumbashi. During the upheavals of the 1960s, the economic and political changes of the 1970s and 1980s and the mounting disorders of the 1990s, the Kanyok have struggled to survive as farmers, workers, warriors and refugees. Although their existence has been precarious, even tragic, to a large extent their experiences are little different from those of millions of other Congolese.

While Westerners tend to express their formal notions about politics in the abstract analytical language of essayists such as Plato, Augustine, Locke, Hobbes and Rawls, the Kanyok rely on story tellers who speak of politics by describing heroic dances, spoiled feasts and supernatural snakes. Political reflections in traditional Kanyok society are cast in the personal and non-syllogistic language of ritual, legend and myth.[19] Kanyok oral traditions contain politically charged narratives about regime change, taxes, treachery, hierarchy, punishment, suffering, vindication and rejection. Although it is impossible in this article to report anything but a small sampling of the available material, I will summarise the following key Kanyok myths depicting the rise and fall of heroic political figures. These tales are: Luaba's generosity; Ngoi and Bandamayi's competition; Ngoi's punishment for breaking a royal

[18] The only two scholarly studies of the Kanyok are Patrick Wymeersch, *Les Bin Kanyok, culture et traditions* (*Rép. du Zaïre*), (Bandundu, Zaïre, 1983); and John C. Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire, An Institutional and Ideological History to 1895* (Cambridge, 1992). Both works are based on field research conducted in Zaïre in the 1970s.

[19] For the purposes of this article, I use the term 'legend' to describe stories that, although they contain a great deal of imaginary material, are connected to actual historical figures. Myth, on the other hand, is used for narratives that are pure intellectual constructs, much like the parables of the New Testament. At first blush, some myths, such as the story of Luaba described on p. 492, may actually appear to be more believable than many legendary accounts. Often the only way to identify a plausible tale (e.g. an eastern hunter who enters the land and seduces a local princess) as a myth is to discover that the identical literary device is used repeatedly to describe many leaders in different regions and time periods.

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citend (cup); Citend's and Shimat's founding the Kanyok state; Cibang a Ciband's victory over the forces of nature; Mulaj a Cibang's installation in office; and Kalonji Milabi's trickery. These widely recited stories describe the accession to and fall from power in vivid narrative form.

In addition to the narratives, the Kanyok have elaborate rituals that mark the death and celebrate the installation of their supreme chief, the Mwen a Kanyok. The public rituals are dramatic performances that parallel and complement the message of the oral accounts about political power. Similar tales and ceremonies can be heard and observed at Kanyok regional capitals and among neighbouring peoples such as the Lunda, Luba and Songye.[20] Therefore, because of their wide distribution, these rituals and stories reflect the perspectives of an extensive savanna cultural complex.

Luaba's generosity

According to Kanyok storytellers, their political saga began ten to fifteen generations ago (*c.* seventeenth century) when hunters from the Luba empire to the east entered the land. Reputedly far superior to the inept local leaders, these eastern hunters provided food for the people, married the daughters of incumbent chiefs, founded new ruling dynasties and established a new, more productive and orderly political system. Typical of the innovative outsiders was a man named Luaba (the name is derived from *kuaba* meaning 'to give' or 'to distribute') who entered the northern Kanyok region with his two sons. When local chiefs came to greet him, Luaba offered them meat and yams. Comparing Luaba to a god, the people were so pleased with his gifts that they gave him a place to settle and asked him to rule as their first chief.[21]

Ngoi's and Bandamayi's competition

Another eastern outsider, Ngoi, who settled near the current Kanyok capital of Mulundu, faced more conflict in establishing his domain. Described by legend as a Luba hunter who entered an empty land, Ngoi overcame the indigenous people, founded villages, established laws and brought order to the new Kanyok region.[22] Once a community had been established, Ngoi and another Kanyok leader Mulaj

[20] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire*, pp. 45–50.
[21] Ibid., pp. 38–9.
[22] Ibid., p. 45.

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Bandamayi were called by the Luba Mulopwe (supreme chief) to return to the Luba capital with gifts of tribute. Ngoi tricked Mulaj by promising to accompany him to the Mulopwe as soon as he himself had time to collect an adequate supply of tribute. Instead, Ngoi, who had gathered his tribute in advance, secretly hurried to the Luba capital where his promptness pleased the Luba chief. Delayed by Ngoi's lie, Bandamayi arrived very late and as punishment was forced to offer his daughter as a wife for his rival Ngoi. By giving his daughter in marriage, Bandamayi conceded not only wealth, but also political rank to Ngoi.[23]

Ngoi's punishment for breaking the royal citend

Eventually, however, Ngoi's political fortunes were reversed. During a subsequent tribute expedition to the Luba capital, he was accused of having broken a ceremonial Luba drinking cup (citend). Even though the devious Luba had cracked the cup before giving it to Ngoi, he was forced to pay restitution in the form of his own daughter. The young woman, who became one of the many wives of the great Luba potentate, gave birth to a daughter that her father the Mulopwe named Citend. Citend grew up at the Luba royal court, but she was constantly mocked by her siblings who said she was a slave named after an object.[24]

Citend's and Shimat's founding of the Kanyok chiefdom

Having determined to escape the humiliation of the Luba court, Citend undertook an arduous journey to her Kanyok homeland. There she was recognised as a princess, installed as chief and presented with gifts of tribute. Somewhat later, Citend married Mwamba Ciluu, another wandering Luba hunter, and gave birth to a son. But, in the end, Citend was deposed from office when she failed in her efforts to offer an important ritual feast. Just when preparations for the celebration were completed, Citend began her menstrual period, became ritually unclean and had to seclude herself in the forest. As a result the ceremonies were cancelled and political rule was suspended. Unable to tolerate the political vacuum caused by Citend's absence, the people determined that her infant son could offer the feast. Seated on the leopard skin reserved for royalty, the child, now named Shimat

[23] Ibid., p. 53.

[24] Ibid., p. 45.

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(to sit firmly), distributed food to the people and was proclaimed chief in place of his mother.[25]

Cibang a Ciband's triumph over nature

According to legend, Cibang a Ciband was the grandson of Shimat. When thunder pealed and lightening struck, Cibang came out of his house, shouted and hurled his weapons at the storm, which then ceased. When night fell, Cibang resisted sleep and remained awake even though all of his followers were unable to stand against the powers of darkness. Finally, refusing to eat, Cibang used his chiefly puissance to defeat even hunger.

Mulaj a Cibang's installation in office

In addition to the Luaba and the Ngoi-Citend-Shimat-Cibang a Ciband cycles of myths about the rise and fall of political leaders, the Kanyok recount another set of tales describing how Mulaj a Cibang, an actual historical figure, was confirmed in office by the Luba Mulopwe. According to Kanyok historians, Mulaj, who took power about 1800, followed the custom of all Kanyok chiefs since the time of Shimat and travelled to the Luba court to offer tribute and seek the approval of the Mulopwe. The Luba potentate was pleased with Mulaj's gifts, but insisted that Mulaj face a series of ordeals before becoming a chief. Among the trials was the order to cut down and completely burn a giant tropical hardwood tree. In addition, Mulaj and his men were required to collect all of their faeces in baskets and carry the contents home. Furthermore, Mulaj was compelled to eat food laced with a powerful poison. Mulaj succeeded in all these trials by gaining the help of court insiders whose favour he had won with his many gifts. Not only did they secretly give him axes to fell the trees, they told him to dispose of both the wood and the faeces by throwing them into the river, and they cautioned him only to pretend to eat the food and then thank the Mulopwe for his generous feast.

At a final trial called the *tombok* Mulaj was required to dance on a series of eight mats arranged before the Mulopwe. Again, with the connivance of court insiders, Mulaj learned that the final mat concealed a deadly pit trap containing upright spears. As he danced on the mats, Mulaj recited proverbs expressing his bravery, power and determination. Halting before the eighth mat, Mulaj hurled his spear into

[25] Ibid., pp. 78–9.

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the hole as the assembled Kanyok and Luba crowd cheered his courage and cleverness. Congratulating the successful Kanyok leader, the Luba Mulopwe invested him in office and reminded him to return with tribute.[26]

Kalonji Milabi's trickery

According to legend, Kabedi, the daughter of the great Kanyok ruler Ilung a Cibang who held office *c.* 1810–20, wanted to marry a valiant man. Therefore, Ilung declared that the man who married Kabedi must accept the challenge of not eating or drinking for an entire week. Knowing that many warriors had tried and failed, Kalonji Milabi prepared for the competition by secretly stashing food and drink outside the chief's compound. Then, after he began his ordeal, he asked permission to go hunting during the day. The trusting Ilung granted the request and the clever Kalonji thus circumvented the rules of the trial by eating and drinking at will. Kalonji's reward for cunningly short-circuiting the game was to win the hand of Kabedi and be installed as chief over extensive territories.[27]

Installation of a Mwen a Kanyok

An elaborate public ritual of chiefly installation complements the preceding political myths and legends about gaining or losing political power.[28] After being selected Mwen a Kanyok, whether through peaceful election or violent combat, the new leader submits to a lengthy series of cermonies clarifying his role and responsibilities. Offering his respect at the grave of his predecessor, the new chief then is led as a captive to a piece of land which he 'purchases' from an individual thought to be descended from the very first inhabitants of the land. Subsequently, the chief is confined to a small hut known as the Mwamba Nzub (Mwamba's house, recalling the husband of Citend) where he has ritual intercourse with a woman presented by the local headman. These ceremonies of enslavement, purchasing land and having ritual intercourse with a surrogate for Citend suggest that the new chief is an outsider and that his power derives from the will of the people.[29]

In addition to the local people living near the capital, representatives

[26] Ibid., p. 64–5.

[27] Ibid., p. 74.

[28] The best description of Kanyok installation rituals is contained in Hugo van Beeck's 'Etude sur les notables Kanioka' (1953), *Archives du Territoire de Mwena Ditu*. See Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire*, pp. 99–100.

[29] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire*, p. 99.

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from subordinate regional capitals participate in the investiture rituals. Chiefs from those villages hunt and kill a leopard and present the skin to the new Mwen a Kanyok. Because the leopard skin is a symbol of royalty, the chiefs indicate both their submission and their indispensability as they carry the skin to the ruler.[30]

Kanyok ancestors also play a crucial role in the installation of a chief. During the time when the chief is held in the Mwamba Nzub, high Kanyok officials prepare a ritual drum, the Mudidi, whose base is made with a human skull, whose body is carved from a supernaturally selected tree, and whose head is covered with the skin of a white goat. Not only do the officials acknowledge the ancestors as they kill the victim whose skull became part of the drum and as they cut down the tree used in carving the drum, but the resonance of the drum when first played signals approval by the company of ancestors.[31]

Finally, after the Mwen a Kanyok is released from the Mwamba Nzub, and after the ritual drum testifies that the ancestors have ratified the choice, the leading officials wash the chief in a small stream whose flowing waters remove any ritual contamination. Then, carried on the back of a porter, he is taken to his compound, dressed in a new robe and given red parrot feathers as a symbol of power and dominion.[32]

NORMATIVE KANYOK POLITICAL VALUES

In an attempt to translate Kanyok political expressions into a language more understandable to a wider audience, and with the goal of drawing some tentative conclusions about the compatibility of traditional African political values with good government and democracy, the remainder of this article will relate Kanyok myths and rituals to a series of questions commonly posed by political philosophers.[33] These questions, which deal with freedom, justice, civic responsibility, limits on power, access to office and the openness of the political process, are all relevant for an analysis of the prospects for democracy in the Congo. The questions are as follows:

(1) Are the moral criteria for the political behaviour of the Kanyok people, both leaders and followers, based on an obligation to *justice* (fairness or right) or to *utility* (best consequences)?

(2) Do the Kanyok hold that people live together in society to benefit the *individual* (the good of all) or the *community* (the general good)?

[30] Ibid., p. 100. [31] Ibid., p. 99. [32] Ibid., p. 100.

[33] For example, see Glen Tinder, *Political Thinking, The Perennial Questions* (Boston, 1979) or Alan Gewirth, *Political Philosophy* (New York, 1989).

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(3) Do the Kanyok believe that people obey government for *security* (protection from 'the war of all against all') or for *convenience* (a complex society functions best with agreed rules)?
(4) Would the Kanyok argue that political power should be exercised because of *social contract among equals* (power based on the consent of the governed) or because of *unequal status* (power from divine right or natural aristocracy)?
(5) According to the Kanyok, what are the proper limits on both the *behaviour* (procedures and operations) and the *range* (control of individual action or resources) of government?
(6) Do the Kanyok perceive the 'ends' of political power to be *negative* (protecting people's pursuit of their own interests) or *positive* (guaranteeing rights even at the expense of individual interests)?

These questions are critically important for the transition to and the consolidation of good government in general and democracy specifically. The legitimacy, durability and security of the regime (associated with stability); the viability of equality, freedom and fairness (linked to tolerance); and the level of support for accessibility and popular control over regime behaviour, and the commitment to collective welfare (needed for accountability) are directly affected by the interpretation and application of these values.

(1) *Justice or utility?*

Although any society's concepts of 'justice' are often subtle rationalisations of a more narrow and self-serving doctrine of 'utility', democratic political philosophy draws on a long tradition which claims that justice, not mere convenience, *ought* to be the foundation of political thought and action. The Greek concept of balance and order, Augustine's belief that even thieves have some understanding of peace, and Rawls' defence of a 'veil of ignorance', all rest on the supposition that politics should adhere to basic principles of fairness and right, principles which in turn are thought to reflect the essential character of society, the mind of God or universal principles of logic. Kanyok political thought, on the other hand, appears to support an almost complete concession to relatively short-term utilitarianism, especially for elite behaviour.

First, the people themselves offer their loyalty to government only because government 'feeds' them. In the story of Luaba, not only his actions but also his name ('to distribute') indicate that for the Kanyok

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the very origins of the polity are linked to utility.[34] Remarkably, even the most central symbol of political order in Kanyok mythology and legend, the founder-princess Citend, could claim legitimacy only so long as she was able to conduct the annual ritual feast. Once the feast had failed, the people shifted their allegiance to her son Shimat. In conceptually related myths, elders at almost every regional Kanyok capital tell stories of how marvellous and handsome stranger-hunters entered the land, generously provided food for the people, and replaced previously functioning political leaders. Frequently, such tales claim the hunter supplanted the local chief by seducing his daughter who was powerfully attracted to the newcomer.[35] By associating the image of abundant food with the concept of a seductively beautiful outsider, Kanyok political myths clearly argue that a system will be valued and adopted because of its relatively immediate utilitarian attractiveness, not because it embodies eternal principles of justice.

Second, the leaders are portrayed, often approvingly, as resorting to trickery and shrewdness. Achieving desired results rather than adhering to principles of consistency or justice seems to be the norm for Kanyok political behaviour. As illustrated by the importance of deceit, insider information and duplicity in the legends about Ngoi, Bandamayi, the Mulopwe and Mulaj a Cibang, the Kanyok appear to believe that 'ends justify the means'. Similarly, the much later story about Kalonji Milabi and Kabedi does not question the use of deception to win a political victory. The Kanyok emphasis on tangible results, whether the spoils distributed to the people by a good leader or the private victories of political players who resort to chicanery, indicates that subterfuge, not justice, is the precept lying at the root of Kanyok politics. Fairness, consistency, and a willingness to forego temporal rewards when principle and justice are at stake are essential for the vigorous exercise of democracy. Those ideals are not deeply embedded in Kanyok political philosophy.

(2) *Individual or community?*

While the tales described in the previous section acknowledge that the elite are likely to pursue a rather narrow and selfish utilitarianism, common citizens are expected to hold different values. Clearly, the Kanyok believe that ordinary people live together in society to benefit

[34] The claim about Luaba's name would be conceptually parallel to saying that George Washington's nickname was Pork Barrel.

[35] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire*, ch. 3, 'New legends for new leaders', pp. 29–50.

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the community rather than the individual. When asked what is the most desirable trait in a citizen, the modern Kanyok person almost always responds by citing 'community spirit'. When asked to identify the least desirable characteristic, he or she usually replies, 'selfishness'. The Kanyok people generally suspect that unusual individual achievements (wealth, power, advanced age and good luck) may be won at great cost to the community. Kanyok are willing to make an exception for chiefs who, in return for maintaining political order, are permitted (or even required) to engage in predatory actions. Such behaviour, however, is not acceptable for ordinary individuals.

The primacy of community over the individual is expressed in a contemporary story about people transforming themselves into elephants. After hearing a number of Kanyok people express their belief that people could turn themselves into elephants, I queried an old headman about the possibility. He confirmed that people, including himself, could indeed become powerful animals such as elephants, but condemned the practice because he said it was used only by individuals hoping to take advantage of others. Someone secretly might take the form of an elephant to destroy a rival's house or property, to gain a commercial advantage when travelling long distances or carrying heavy loads were at stake, or to eat someone else's food without having to pay compensation. While admitting that individual gain might be significant, the old chief said the damage to the community would be great and, even though he himself had the power to do so, he would never turn himself into an elephant. This story parallels other Kanyok criticisms of wealthy, powerful and selfish individuals.[36]

So pervasive and deeply held is the notion that community should take precedence over the individual, that political myths rarely need to present an explicit defence of the concept. Nevertheless, the widely repeated political cliché of the ruler providing a feast suggests unambiguously that the entire people participates in the political largesse and that legitimacy is based on the ability of a ruler to satisfy the whole community. At first blush, therefore, it may be surprising that when asked if they could recall examples of wealthy individuals using their resources to gain political office, no one in any Kanyok village could think of a single example. Actually, stories of wealthy individuals attaining political office are the concrete reality behind the feast cliché. The fact that the Kanyok celebrate offering a feast to the entire community even though they refuse to acknowledge the political

[36] Ibid., pp. 107–9.

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accomplishments of affluent political victors suggests that everyone views the community as far more important than the individual.

Certainly, democracy can take root in societies that honour community over the individual as well as in societies that privilege the individual over the community. The contrast between democratic Japan and democratic America proves that assertion. Nevertheless, the Kanyok accent on community suggests that efforts to build African democracies by promoting individualism may be prone to failure.

(3) *Security or convenience?*

The Kanyok believe that people obey government both for security and for convenience. But when considering the external environment, they are quite Hobbesian in their outlook. A number of village legends of origin recall that before a Luba hunter arrived in the land, the people were constantly troubled by marauding neighbours who pillaged gardens and kidnapped women. In addition to legends of origins, Kanyok history contains countless tales of heroic defence against aggressive outsiders. Furthermore, the Kanyok people's most impressive effort at public works was the construction of two huge fortifications (*ihak*), each consisting of a long circular trench (one 7 km, the other 11 km in circumference) about 3 m deep and 3 m wide. Both the *ihak* and the Kanyok chief who constructed and used them are widely celebrated in Kanyok history.[37]

Internal control and order are also primary Kanyok concerns. Within the polity, individual conduct is regulated by social pressure and the fear of magical reprisals, as well as by political and legal action. Powerful political figures employ magic to control behaviour. Not only do they direct their energies against potential rivals or traitors; they are also charged with the maintenance of orderly behaviour among the general populace. People are well aware that theft, murder and adultery (theft of one's right to an heir) are constrained by magic as much as by the coercion and jurisprudence wielded by the body politic. For example, when asked how poachers who might invade a village's hunting area are controlled, people reply that such illegal activity would result, by means of the supernatural, in the culprit's illness or even death.

However, when describing family affairs, the Kanyok are less convinced of the need for firm government control. Kanyok experts

[37] Ibid., pp. 69–77.

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claim that within the confines of the family and village, the people can conduct their affairs without strong political oversight. This view is expressed by the assertion that, within the family, even theft and murder should be settled by discussions among the interested elders.[38]

Thus, externally and, to a great extent, domestically, Kanyok political philosophy expresses the pessimism of a thinker such as Hobbes. Frequently, however, when considering how to manage people within the confines of the immediate kin group, the Kanyok exhibit much of the optimism of Locke. This somewhat dichotomous perspective supports a suspicious antagonism toward the actions of outsider and strangers, but begets a lenient tolerance towards the behaviour of insiders. On the one hand, attitudes of distrust and suspicion may undermine the spirit of compromise and tolerance necessary for harmony in a pluralistic society. On the other hand, habits of indulgence for the deeds of friends may relax the standards of conduct for associates and kin who are freed to become predators on the polis.

(4) *Social contract of citizens or unequal status?*

With some important qualifications, Kanyok political philosophy argues that political power is and should be exercised because of a ruler's elevated status. This contrasts with basing power on the will of the people who join together in a social contract. The central myth of Citend specifically emphasises that Citend shared the blood of her father, the Luba Mulopwe. In Luba and Kanyok thought, supreme political power is associated with the concept of *bulopwe*, a belief that authority is transmitted through royal blood and through taking possession of the emblems of sovereignty. A successful candidate gains power by seizing these emblems (the genitals, skull and tendons of the previous ruler) in battle. Such a process does not concede choice to the governed.[39]

Other common Kanyok myths also indicate that political power is acquired because of a ruler's innate or acquired qualities. For example, the tale of Cish Mukul's rise to power recounts how he and another man named Zongol presented themselves as candidates for the office of Mwen a Etond. According to legend, Cish Mukul was attired in the clothes of a chief, while his hapless rival had no clothes at all. Because Cish Mukul had the appearance and demeanour of a leader, he was

[38] Ibid., p. 96.

[39] Wymeersch, *Les Bin Kanyok*, p. 42.

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lodged with a high court official and given the essential insider information needed to dance the deadly *tombok* ritual. In the end, of course, Cish Mukul, the more comely candidate, was selected chief of Etond.[40]

Plainly, the Kanyok do not expect the people to exercise a right to choose their leaders and they hold that power legitimately belongs to those of high status. Nevertheless, conspicuous elements in both myths and rituals show that Kanyok political philosophy did not grant political authority apart from the people's consent. A leader's personal traits (charisma) and the blood of *bulopwe* (tradition) were essential components of legitimacy, but a successful ruler gained and remained in office only as long as he or she retained the support of the governed. The symbolic purchase from the local inhabitants of a place to live and the ritual in which the subjects led a newly elected chief as a slave were ceremonial affirmations of a social contract between the ruler and the people.

A tale from the southern Kanyok village of Hamb confirms the notion that chiefs depend on the backing of their subjects. After defeating his weak local rivals, Katengul, a prototypical eastern hunter whose innate regal superiority gave him the right to rule, announced that he now would be chief. Although the humiliated previous leader Kashibu departed in shame, Katengul soon had to beg him to return and to render his blessing on the new political order. The catalyst for the request was a life-threatening illness. According to the tale, once Kashibu fled, Katengul's belly began to swell and he feared he would die. As a result, Katengul implored Kashibu to return and guard him as he exercised power.[41]

Successful democracy generally tolerates a balance between leaders serving in response to a social contract of all the people and leaders claiming the right to political power because of their superior status conferred by personal charisma or family tradition. But, in the absence of other robust restraints on a ruler's power, ambitious African leaders can easily manipulate the tension between social contract and unequal status to their advantage. Proclaiming that their heritage or extraordinary personal character gives them a permanent right to incumbency, they often reduce the social contract to meaningless symbolism and relegate the consent of the people to ritualistic expressions of support.

[40] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaïre*, pp. 36–7.

[41] Ibid., pp. 35–6.

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(5) *Limits on government's behaviour and range?*

Although Kanyok political practice and philosophy prescribe some limits on both the behaviour and the range of government activity, the weight of traditional opinion favours a powerful chief whose deeds are relatively unconstrained. Tales describing the late eighteenth-century ruler Cibang a Ciband imply that a chief is endowed with an almost supernatural scope for action. Remembered as the chief who conquered lightning, night and hunger, Cibang elevated a ruler's might to majestic levels. Such stories, celebrating the Mwen a Kanyok's potency, imply no restriction on a leader's power or scope of action.[42]

Political rumours and/or propaganda from the late nineteenth century corroborate the idea that a chief's scope of action was subject to few limits. Kabw Muzemb, a powerful Mwen a Kanyok (*c.* 1880–93) had a well-deserved reputation for cruelty. This reputation, however, was almost certainly exaggerated by stories circulated by his court to increase people's fear and respect for the chief. According to such tales, Muzemb arose each morning by supporting himself on spears whose points dug into the legs of his slaves, he cut open the bellies of pregnant women to expose their foetuses, he shot arrows at workers displaying a lack of energy as they performed corvée and he retained cannibals to consume unruly criminals.[43]

In spite of the many stories granting great power to the chief, Kanyok political philosophy imposes some limits on leaders. Occasionally, legend reports that a chief's reign ended in an inglorious fall from power. Generally, such stories describe the event with a typical cliché, which says the chief became drunk, failed to offer a feast and was removed from office.[44] But tales of drunkenness, a common Central African metaphor for political disorder,[45] indicate that it was the danger of chaos, not the distaste for cruelty that undermined a chief's legitimacy. It is true that Kanyok elders all claim that the chief's council has the right to remove an individual from office. However, because the historical record contains no account of any council actually exercising that right, the notion appears to be a more of a theoretical possibility than a plausible consequence causing concern for specific rulers.

Although the need for legitimacy may, at times, justify the efforts of democratic governments to cloak themselves in symbols of near-

[42] Ibid., pp. 58–60. [43] Ibid., pp. 132–3. [44] Ibid., pp. 24, 56.
[45] Luc de Heusch, *The Drunken King, or, The Origin of the State* (Bloomington, CO, 1982).

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majestical power, healthy democracies maintain strong limits on the actions of government institutions and officials. For the Kanyok, such constraints on political behaviour are subordinated to the emphasis on might.

(6) *Negative or positive protection?*[46]

Kanyok concern for negative rights (freedoms 'from') is closely tied to the people's concern for defence, an anxiety evident in legend's preoccupation with outside aggression. Not only do traditional accounts describe heroic battles, they also contain frequent references to the efforts of leaders to define and defend ethnic borders. According to legend, when Mulaj a Cibang and his brother Ilung returned from the Luba Mulopwe's capital, they hurled their ceremonial axes into the Lubilash River separating Kanyok and Luba territory. By this act involving instruments of cutting, they permanently severed diplomatic and tribute relations with an oppressive neighbour.[47] Legend further asserts that the schismatic actions of humans were sometimes ratified by supernatural intervention. At the end of the early nineteenth-century wars in which the Kanyok liberated themselves from the Luba, a giant serpent rose from the water to form a bridge over the Lubilash River. Although briefly connecting the two lands, when Luba warriors attempted to use the link, the serpent descended into the rushing waters drowning the Luba Mulopwe and his men.[48]

As previously described, Kanyok political thought gives only limited support to the notion that government has an obligation to guarantee the citizens' domestic negative rights.[49] Paradoxically, however, the Kanyok believe the government has a strong duty to provide positive benefits to the people. The persistent clichés of generous hunter chiefs sharing the bounty of their efforts or of leaders offering feasts to the entire people point to the importance of positive rights in Kanyok lore. Instead of recounting another traditional story to illustrate this fact, I will describe the political and economic situations of two Kanyok villages that show the importance of economic redistribution. Museng and Etond, two villages I visited in 1975, lie about 15 km apart. Museng, a prosperous village with a dynamic and generous chief, boasted a large and relatively well-satisfied population. Perhaps because the land and forest around Museng were more bountiful or because the chief was more skilful in publicly redistributing the wealth

[46] For a discussion of the notions of positive and negative rights see Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford, 1958).

[47] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaire*, p. 68.

[48] Ibid., pp. 72–3.

[49] See above, Section (3) Security or Convenience.

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people offered as tribute, the citizens of Museng were content with their chief and with the political process. Etond, a poorer village whose chief was less generous in holding feasts and redistributing the spoils of tribute, was losing population and the people who remained were openly critical of their leader.[50] Thus, the political situations of Etond and Museng confirmed the message of myths and legends that government is expected to be generous. In spite of the fact that their pre-industrial technology permits only low levels of material output, the Kanyok thus hold a remarkable positive interpretation of the 'ends' of political power. In traditional Kanyok political philosophy, government is expected not only to protect peoples' pursuit of their own interests (negative rights), but also to provide economic rewards (positive rights).[51]

True, there is nothing intrinsically undemocratic about expectations that government should grant both negative and positive rights. But the new Congo government does not command the economic resources nor the citizen loyalty necessary to provide consistent protection from infringements on personal liberty, or to provide support for the social benefits generally regarded as rights in advanced industrial societies. Because the Congolese may have unrealistic expectations about government generosity, their faith in politics may quickly turn to cynicism. New democracies are unlikely to persist in a context of uncertain support or even temporary hostility.

CONCLUSIONS: LEARNING FROM AFRICAN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Diplomats, scholars and political leaders recognise the difficulty of establishing good government, let alone democratic political systems in Africa.[52] Some suggest that Africans find solutions to their problems in the wisdom of their own traditions. In his widely read *Africa Betrayed*, George Ayittey presents an idealised view of traditional African

[50] Yoder, *The Kanyok of Zaïre*, p. 41.

[51] Nehemia Levtzion observed that Western and Kanyok mores about the link between power and wealth are reversed. In the West, using personal wealth to purchase political office (witness the extremely high cost of gaining elected office) is considered moral and normal but using public office to generate and distribute personal wealth is condemned as illegal. The Kanyok, on the other hand, claim they do not use personal wealth to gain political power, but they see no wrong in using political power to generate and distribute personal wealth. Comments at the African Studies Association Meeting, Toronto, November 1994.

[52] Even the most optimistic assessments of Africa's progress towards democracy admit that Africa's democracies are at best fragile and superficial. For example, see Larry Diamond, 'Democracy: the second liberation', *Africa Report* 37, 6 (1992), pp. 38–41. Since Diamond wrote his essay in 1992, the mood has become even more pessimistic.

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political systems and he commends the patterns and wisdom of the past to modern leaders. In Ayittey's view, a deep respect for tolerance, accommodation, peaceful coexistence and autonomy for the various groups living within the state characterised traditional systems. He argues that chiefs were limited by clear checks and balances, that a ruler was an embodiment of the common good rather than of particular interests, and that colonialism corrupted what had worked effectively in the past. Therefore, for Ayittey, the *habitus* of African traditional values is compatible with good government and would strengthen the progress of democratisation.[53]

Reviewing Kanyok political traditions, however, suggests that rural people in the Congo may subscribe to a rather different set of principles than those outlined by Ayittey and required for the successful consolidation of democracy. Instead of an emphasis on tolerance, accommodation, peaceful coexistence, ethnic harmony, checks and balances, and a concern for the common good, traditional Kanyok political values support a different set of propositions. For the Kanyok short-term and selfish utility is more important than abstract justice or fairness. They value community more highly than individual rights, and their fear of internal and external disorder overshadows their concern for official misconduct. They concede great power to a leader because they believe his or her innate stature is superior to that of the subjects. The Kanyok accept minimal limits on government so long as rulers appear generous in redistributing the spoils of the political system. And finally, they have unrealistically high expectations of the positive rights government should deliver.

The set of political values held by the Kanyok suggests that the foundational concepts of rural political philosophy are more compatible with a corporatist or bureaucratic-authoritarian model than with a democratic system. In such regimes, autocratic rulers, elevated above the people and the law, gain their subjects' favour with patronage, protection and punishment. The people for their part, position themselves to take advantage of the rewards or to escape from the state.[54] Thus, if Kanyok values are representative of rural Central Africa, the people and leaders of the Congo may be prone to drift back to the path charted by Mobutu. In fact, Mobutu's autocracy and

[53] George B. N. Ayittey, 'Indigenous African political institutions', in Ayittey, *Africa Betrayed* (New York, 1992), ch. 3, pp. 37–77. From a very different perspective, Marxists or socialists have long claimed that traditional African political patterns and ideas were compatible with modern socialism or communism.

[54] Michael Schatzberg, *The Dialectics of Oppression in Zaire* (Bloomington, 1988).

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authenticité may actually have drawn on more genuinely African political presuppositions than Ayittey would be willing to concede.

Nevertheless, neither the Congo nor any other African nation, is forever condemned to live with corrupt or non-democratic political institutions. Nor should rural Congolese political values be dismissed as immutable, unworthy or resolutely anti-democratic. Each of the six sets of Kanyok political beliefs contains positive as well as negative attributes. While the traditional values of the countryside may have hindered democracy and good government since 1960, they could, if used astutely, support tolerance, accountability and stability. Mobutu's selfish and anchorless pragmatism built a climate tolerant of corruption. But, values of utilitarianism and flexibility could protect against overly moralistic policies or a programmatically rigid political elite. Irresponsible government promises about positive rewards and the tendency to use the political system to reap spoils created a nation characterised by selfishness, waste and despair. But, if patronage can be contained to reasonable levels, attention to local expectations would obligate government to be responsive to the needs and demands of the people. Mobutu's pursuit of near deification resulted in arrogance and abuse; but a certain degree of reverence for leaders is essential for regime stability. Certainly, Mobutu capitalised on a fear of anarchy in order to maintain his tyranny, yet a reasonable deference to the power of the state is needed in ethnically divided societies.

The challenge for the Democratic Republic of the Congo – as its people write a new constitution, establish new protocols of authority, develop new symbols of nationhood and reorder the economy – is to use the elements from its heritage in ways that support and sustain, rather than undermine, stable and responsible government. The path to that kind of polity is marked by pragmatism without neglect for justice, esteem for the larger community without contempt for individual rights, a defence of order and security without tolerating venality among high public officials, a respect for leadership without succumbing to sycophancy and tyranny, the cultivation of support for government without returning to the inefficiencies of rampant patronage, and loyalty to the polis without expecting the system to achieve extravagant benefits beyond protecting law and order.

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