

Raoul Peck's *Lumumba*: History or Hagiography?

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In: *Black and White in Colour: African History on Screen*,
eds. Vivian Bickfort-Smith and Richard Mendel,

Cape Town, Oxford, Athens: David Philip, James Currey, University of Ohio Press, in press.

Ceci une histoire vrai – ‘this is a true story’ – is what viewers read a few minutes into Raoul Peck's *Lumumba*¹, in the bold authority that only print wields on film. Peck's claim is mostly accurate: the ‘docu-drama’ traces the rise and grisly fall of Patrice Lumumba (Eriq Ebouaney), the most short-lived and arguably most famous prime minister in Africa, with remarkable veracity. This truth needs little varnishing to be exciting enough for a feature-styled film, a combination of political thriller and ‘Africa in the Cold War’ history lesson with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) at its centre. With a careful blend of narrative prescience and archival accuracy, *Lumumba* encompasses the six months of Lumumba's post-independence political life – and the few years before that, as he struggled for Congo's independence and his rise to power – skating on quite firm historical and film-making ice. Yet Peck's focus on Lumumba as an individual hero, rather than the meeting point of the socio-economic and political forces conditioning his existence and elimination, threatens to turn the film into the portrait of a saint rather than a complex political figure. In the process, the inevitable flaws the historian uncovers in the ethereal figure become magnified. When he crashes down to earth the causes in which he was embedded and for which he spoke can too easily become discredited as well, and the foundations of progressive historical construction must begin again. However, the opening of the space represented by this film – and shared with a number of similar cultural productions – indicates a wide re-thinking of Lumumba and his country's history. After a brief synopsis and historical contextualisation of *Lumumba* this chapter will discuss these themes and issues in depth.

Synopsis

Lumumba is the political biography of a postal clerk and, later, beer salesman who in 1960 became prime minister of one of the biggest and most resource-endowed countries in Africa when its colonial master, Belgium, decided precipitously but ungenerously to untie its strings. The film begins and ends with variations on two scenes: in one, a severely tortured

Lumumba is driven to his death while his voice utters philosophical projections about his role in and the future of Africa, he and two comrades are shot in the night-time woods by a firing squad, and Belgian soldiers chop, saw, dissolve and burn his corpse; in the other, hundreds of richly sated souls lull around a luscious feast at which, we discover at the end, Lumumba's usurper cynically proclaims a national holiday in Lumumba's name. Thus from the very beginning we know that there will be no surprises: we are watching the truth; we will not be shocked. However, the pace of events and Lumumba's magnetism when times are propitious make the audience live with the hopes of the present, forgetting his eventual fate.

The charismatic Patrice Lumumba is almost immediately transported from his humble beginnings to the heady days of pre-independence political jockeying, and just as quickly from rally-rousing induced imprisonment, to the Brussels Roundtable and the hammering out of the 'nation's' new constitution in early 1960. Seemingly faster, albeit more obscurely given the manoeuvring and the coalition-building necessitated by the Congo's many parties, he is nominated to the DRC's prime minister-ship by the new president, Joseph Kasu Vubu (Maka Kotto) after Lumumba's *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC), the only really nationally oriented party amidst a panoply of particularistic ones, wins a plurality in the June 15 1960 elections. However, quicker still, Lumumba's robust nationalism and thirst for social justice earns him the enmity of a host of local power contenders and world players: Moïse Tshombe (Pascal N'Zonzi) and the cold-blooded Godefroid Munungo (Dieudonné Kabongo), the two Katangese politicians who later, in co-operation with the Belgian government and mining corporations try to secede their extraordinarily mineral-rich province, and later still preside over Lumumba's assassination; King Baudouin of Belgium, angered by Lumumba's passionate and unscheduled speech at the inauguration of independence on June 30, 1960 in response to the King's platitudes about the glories of Belgium's civilising mission and his warnings against too much reform; the American diplomats and spies who fear his dalliance with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the development of a Cuba in Africa; and Joseph Désiré Mobutu (Alex Descas), once his best friend and comrade, who when he gains leadership of the armed forces becomes his enemy and the dictator in his wake.

After only two months, during which soldiers revolt over the continuation of Belgian control over the ranks and their lack of pay and promotion, Katanga secedes, Lumumba's and

Mobutu's soldiers massacre hundreds of people in Kasai, and the USSR is asked to contribute planes and soldiers because the United Nations refused to allow its peace-keepers to bring Katanga back to the Congolese fold, Kasa Vubu removes Lumumba from his post. Days after that, Lumumba is placed under house arrest by his fair-weather friend Mobutu, who then carries out a 'peaceful revolution' – or coup – to ensure Lumumba does not return to power by the parliamentary road. In November, the ex-prime minister attempts escape to Stanleyville, his home town and the base for his diminishing support, but is foiled when he refuses to allow his wife and child to be beaten by Mobutu's troops while he canoes across the river to his freedom. By January 17 1961 his enemies agree to fly Lumumba from his grimy jail to Katanga, where Tshombe, Munongo, and a coterie of Belgians torture and kill him and his two comrades.

As his body parts burn in an oil drum, he speaks from beyond the grave. 'History will have its say one day,' we hear. 'It won't be a history written in Brussels, Paris or Washington. It will be ours, the history of a new Africa.' As a match lights, we hear the film's last words: 'And on that day ...' Flames erupt from the barrel of acid that has been decomposing Lumumba's body. We are to imagine the revolutionary impact inspired by a truly African history. The two young and glowering soldiers who in the previous scene refuse to clap for Mobutu Sesé Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (the all powerful warrior who goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake) are, we suppose, the bearers of this new history.

Historical context

As Peck promised, the film is 'true'. There is little in this synopsis that history books do not confirm, aside from a collapsing of one demonstration into another and a few other 'historical inventions' that Rosenstone notes cinematically constrained narratives create.² As did seventeen other African countries, the Congo gained its independence in 1960. Belgium, however, being a late (and particularly brutal and hypocritical³) starter at the colonial game did not foresee this eventuality in decent time. It trained fewer candidates to be ruling or administrative cadres than did the other colonial powers, resulting in fewer *évolués* – including Lumumba – than its peers. However, its pace of mineral extraction and agricultural commercialisation created an urbanised and partially proletarianised population rapidly,⁴ and when some of the demonstrations and riots illustrated in *Lumumba* erupted, the Belgians

decided to pull out as quickly as possible – hoping to retain economic and administrative control while pliant politicians enjoyed big cars and the other perquisites of power. Lumumba was not as tractable as expected. His commitment to national unity rather than tribally based political structures and their federalist constitutional arrangements, and his Pan-African ideology, were worrisome to the colonialists who wanted independence to be just a ‘word’. His assertion that the resources of his country would be used for the benefit of the Congolese sounded suspiciously like socialism, too. The Americans – the neo-colonialists hoping to gain strategic minerals from countries like the Congo (remember, the uranium that bombed Hiroshima was from the DRC!) and to keep them away from their Cold War enemy, the USSR – hoped to be able to spread their notion of democracy a little more enthusiastically than the jaded Europeans, but were willing to dispense with it for their greater good.⁵ Lumumba was a threat to all of these ‘Western’ interests, and seemed a bit unstable and impolite to boot; whether or not the imperialists were behind everything going wrong in the Congo (as Lumumba seemed to think) they were behind enough of it to make anyone suspicious. No Western power involved in Lumumba’s Congo hesitated to let his local enemies – well contextualised in the film’s discussion of ethnicity and regionalism – eliminate him, and indeed encouraged them heartily.

Thus the film is ‘true’. In as much as an extraordinary degree of the Congo’s fate revolved around the solitary figure of Lumumba, and it is ‘individuals’ on which films focus best,⁶ it is difficult to fault Peck for focussing so intently on the man of the moment. Indeed, the fact that Mobutu would prove to be one individual powerful enough to nearly destroy the whole country over the next thirty-five years also justifies zooming in on these two characters.

Lumumba’s mistaken appointment of Mobutu as head of the armed forces and his Shakespearian betrayal are confronted directly. *Lumumba* foreshadows Mobutu’s corruption and collusion, lasting until he was ousted in 1997 by an ostensible ‘Lumumbaist’, Laurent-Désiré Kabila with the help of Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers.⁷ The young soldiers in the national holiday scene symbolise this – but the film, finished in 2000, could not predict what many observers say could only have been organised by the same people who erased Lumumba from history. Exactly forty years after Lumumba’s murder, Kabila was assassinated by one of his bodyguards. His son Joseph rules in a manner more suited to ‘good governance’ dictums and economic management, yet the country is still best described as ‘war-torn’, even with elections due in mid-2006.⁸

Peck's closing states clearly that he hopes *Lumumba* will have an effect on Africa's history: that although at present there is little evidence of Lumumba's prophecy coming true, films like this might hasten such eventualities. The film must be judged in this light. It is this chapter's contention that although the film is an important intervention in this process of making history, and individuals such as Lumumba invent history almost as much they are invented by its conditions, unfortunately Peck focuses so much on Lumumba himself that the project of making history a *collective* endeavour is compromised. Hagiography, rather than history, does not a revolutionary cinema make.

Lumumba's focus on and sanctification of Patrice Lumumba tends to hide deep social and political forces structuring the agency of all political actors. As Rosenstone argues, it is possible to 'avoid the glorification of the individual' in a film: by not doing so Peck has avoided the difficulties of what Rosenstone calls 'non-bourgeois modes of representation'.⁹ To further complicate matters, Peck neglects important facets of Lumumba's biography, thus compromising even his individualised notion of the 'truth'. Because his film places so much weight on one man, if it misrepresents *any* aspect of Lumumba's life the film as a whole is in danger of collapsing. Saints, like giants, have a long way to fall. It does not take much, however, to start the tumble. Then they fall very quickly, and when they hit the ground the impact is very hard. A careful study of the bizarre world of the social and political contradictions surrounding him, however, would erase, or at least contextualise, the desire to create a complete hero and to craft his hagiography.

Two Films, two ways of telling the truth

Lumumba is Peck's second film about the man with this name. The first is the experimentally styled *Lumumba: Death of the Prophet*.¹⁰ It begins by challenging received notions of 'telling the truth' cinematically, as if in direct dialogue with Rosenstone's discussion.¹¹ *Death of the Prophet* is full of talking-head interviews with Lumumba's comrades, enemies, and his daughter. Most contest the notion that either the news media or history can be free of bias. Our distrust of the notion of objectivity is compounded when Peck prefaces many controversial 'facts' with the phrase: 'my mother told me ...', thus suggesting that history is reconstructed by significant others telling stories and weaving mythologies. When we learn that the newsreel footage of Mobutu's soldiers grabbing the captured Lumumba in the back of a pick-up truck cost £3 000 a minute, and that Peck did not film in the DRC because he

discovered its secret service was ‘very interested’ in his project, the difficulties involved in producing history on film are displayed. Viewers gain insight into the social and historical context of the film when we see eight millimetre film memories of Peck’s *petite-bourgeois* childhood in the DRC’s capital city, Leopoldville. There, his mother was secretary to many mayors and his father was a Haitian professor of agricultural sciences, brought over by the French in order to build some ‘capacity’ in an educational system ill-prepared for independence. When Peck suggests that he gained interest in Lumumba when his mother brought home a photograph of this Christ-like presence at an ominous press conference in her office, viewers are inducted into the inspiration of such works. Furthermore, the oddly pervasive presence of Belgian streets and passers-by, paralleled with ostentatious dinner parties counterpoised with the narrative of Lumumba’s untimely and unthinkably cruel assassination, reminds us of the colonial complicity contextualising the politics of Lumumba’s quick rise to, and quicker fall from, power. *Death of a Prophet* challenges notions of documentary truth at every turn: it contests the construction of history in a way Rosenstone would condone.

Lumumba’s differences go beyond that fact that it is a ‘docu-drama’ with actors recreating their historical counterparts, resonating both Shakespeare and Hollywood, instead of ‘retired anarchists’ reflecting on the surrealist qualities of political life in the Congo *circa* 1960. The significant distinction is in the way the films contend with the ‘truth’. *Death of the Prophet* challenges its genre’s very foundations. Yet *Lumumba* claims it is ‘a true story’, challenging Rosenstone’s warning about the confines of the narrative and the pitfalls of romantic – or tragic – cinematic constructions:¹² there are no self-conscious warnings about the tenuous nature of political history on film. ‘Take it or leave it’, *Lumumba* says, and lots of lines lifted from archival records make the point that its ‘data’ rivals any historian’s. To be sure, *Lumumba*’s broad historical sweep can be faulted very little, and, almost as important for Rosenstone, its ideological slant is consistently progressive: *Lumumba*’s facts and interpretations are very close to the ‘overall data and *meanings* of what we already know of the past’ – if ‘we’ are broadly left-wing critics of colonial and neo-colonial actions on the periphery of the global capitalist system, sympathising with those trying to reverse their negative effects and to accentuate their good ones.¹³

Yet to claim the film is the ‘truth’ is impossible – especially when many truths are ignored in its singular pursuit. Of course, all of this is more difficult in Africa than it was in

Rosenstone's Eisensteinian alternative: revolutionary Russia, where the 'group' – the revolutionary working class – could be presented as a progressive protagonist. In the DRC in 1960, the very nature of the social structure and the political process placed extraordinary power in the hands of the individual on its fragile pinnacle. Simultaneously, however, the pressures pulling at this power were so delicate that even if Lumumba *had* been a saint worthy of biblical portrayals, the 'right moves' were extremely elusive and the wrong groups too ready to move into the vacuums occasioned by the slightest of mistakes. Thus it is very important to analyse – and portray cinematically, if possible – the social forces constraining individual action in such situations. This chapter will attempt this, as well as discussing *Lumumba* in the context of the global cultural representations that have arisen in the wake of the DRC's consistent crisis.

Embezzling History: The Man=Masses Myth

Lumumba bears a close relationship to Ludo de Witte's book *The Assassination of Lumumba*, the most thorough investigation of Lumumba's death to date. Indeed, the Peck and de Witte have discussed the events represented in the film.¹⁴ Perusing other history books also indicates affinity between *Lumumba* and 'the facts' professional historians – even those with a different ideological perspective than Peck – represent.¹⁵ What could a sympathetic political historian find wrong with such a film? The key is in Peck's attempts to make Lumumba a complete hero, assuming that whatever Lumumba said and did was an automatic reflection of what everybody in the Congo really wanted. This has left Peck and his film open to criticism by anyone pursuing the historical texts on the DRC diligently, as well as to those attempting to add class analysis to the picture. In this post-nationalist and post-modern age, 1960s tropes are inadequate to the task of reconstructing history and rebuilding Africa. This is not to say that nationalism and modernism should be thrown out with dirty bathwater of their many failed projects, but to suggest that if filmmakers and other constructors of cultural artefacts do not add more nuance and context to their subjects, their audiences will respond with cynicism. The nationalist tendency to construct big heroes who are at one with the undifferentiated 'masses' will not wash anymore. *Lumumba* lets us down on that score.

Lumumba is definitely the hero in the film of his name. To make a myth of him, however, the audience must believe that if only the hero had lived, the Congo would be a

much better place today. The audience does not get to know enough about Lumumba to know if this might be the case. It can easily find out, however, if the film slips in its efforts to tell us the truths of Lumumba as an *individual*, as well as his struggles in the context of a history setting conditions that he did not choose. If films fail to tell all the truths, they do not take us beyond the cynical assertion that in the real world there are no heroes, but there are always people wanting to make them. Precisely because *Lumumba* focuses so much on an individual, its truth must take us to the intimate surfaces of the large historical forces and the predictions of politicians and philosopher-kings – to the nitty-gritty of its ‘hero’s’ life. *Lumumba* fails – ever so slightly – on that count, and so compromises the big picture too. It almost self-consciously falls short of admitting any fault in its hero. Thus, in addition to not countering the tendencies within ‘Africanist’ history to celebrate its mythmakers uncritically while blaming outside forces for the unhappy fate of its subject matter, it overly simplifies both the individual and the context.

Lumumba replicates the ‘pan-Africanist’ truth. The man was a hero undiminished by his death. Indeed, his assassination propelled him into a nationalist and pan-Third Worldist sainthood, as this bloody truth exemplified the nefarious machinations of the imperialists and their comprador lackeys in Katanga and beyond. As a restrained British analyst wrote only a few years after Lumumba’s assassination, after his death:

...the details of [his] character and actions had been forgotten and ... he had been accepted purely and simply as the symbol of the African nationalist struggle ... he was depicted by one half of the world as an inspired statesman leading his people against all odds.¹⁶

Replete with nationalism – sovereignty’s sacred texts – this image is fleshed out by the discourse of social justice and anti-imperialism. The heroism is contextualised well too, with the nuances of the Congo’s ethnic contradictions and local power struggles merging intricately with the politics of the Cold War. Yet posing these epic truths as the only ones worth knowing is not enough – even within the bounds of a Shakespearian tragedy so self-conscious, the viewer begins to think the screen, not just the world, is a stage. Yet the small truths – including Lumumba’s complex nature – affect the big ones, including the role of the United Nations in the crisis centring on the Congo and its new leader, because the film accepts Lumumba’s ‘word’ as final. The film’s own truth, then, is compromised by these lacunae. The devil is in the detail, and saints have very little in their way. The troubling

specificities must be encountered, otherwise the portrayal of the hero becomes little more than propaganda.

The pervasive myth of African nationalism merges one political man and the masses. That it is hard to shake off in the Congo is illustrated not only by *Lumumba*, but also by the otherwise brilliant and detailed *The Assassination of Lumumba*. De Witte too easily asserts that ‘each time Lumumba spoke, it was basically the masses speaking’. He also implies that if another self-proclaimed Lumumbaist – Laurent-Désiré Kabila – had had his way, an ‘authentically nationalist programme’ would have been on the cards.¹⁷

Assuredly, as Guy Tillim’s photography illustrates, the crowds lined up saluting Kabila as he marched across the border from Rwanda into Goma, suggest that man and mass appeared to merge again in the DRC with his arrival.¹⁸ But what to make of the thousands who came to Mobutu’s beck and call, the worst manifestation of that fusion? Michel Thierry’s *Mobutu: King of Zaire*¹⁹ – essential viewing, to be seen immediately after Peck’s *Lumumba* – allows one to see just how perilous a too quick assertion of the man=masses equation is. Thierry shows thousands of ‘masses’ in awe of their leader, more so than those opposing his dictatorship or even looting following its demise. If the masses are presumed to be at one with their leader, it is just too easy for the leader to justify his every move as ‘popular’, as did Mobutu. How could such a being ever be accused of dictatorship?

When considering Lumumba’s short career the question becomes: how could Mobutu’s masses be the same as his? Mobutu did not have almost supernatural powers enabling him to pull the wool over their eyes. Nor did he simply dominate and terrorise them into fear. It is unlikely, too, that the masses all changed their minds in favour of the next leader – after Mobutu so cynically declared himself at one with the man he helped kill, by proclaiming a national holiday in his name. One must look beyond the myth that one leader – any leader – can speak for the masses, assimilating their ‘collective consciousness’ like sponges soak up water. For one thing, when one man – even a hero – is made synonymous with ‘the masses’ both lose complexity as well as freedom. As Jean-Paul Sartre – a Lumumba admirer as well as a fan of freedom – noted, individuals and ‘the masses’ are in a ‘constant state of self-transformation and self-production’ as one’s self (either the leader or any individual within the ‘mass’) plays ‘an active part within the masses as a conscious collection of individuals who make history’: this is not a one-to-one relationship but a fusion of dialectical interactions.²⁰ The crude perspective also posits masses without classes (or tribes, genders, or

generations), and their leaders do not have problems – or ‘pasts’ – because they are at one with a perfectly righteous mass. However, the Congolese masses, just as in any heterogeneous social formation struggling to emerge within the bosom of a fragile ‘nation-state’, were and are replete with divisions and fissures. It should not be surprising if its leaders have problems, and convoluted histories.

Lumumba only hints at a past every part-time historian knows about Lumumba. When Lumumba receives his visa allowing travel to Ghana, where he will meet the pan-African scions Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, the sweating Belgian official says: ‘You have a police record. And you hope to travel?’ Lumumba answers: ‘Yes.’ That is it. The audience may wonder what record Lumumba had, but the official only alludes to connections in high places allowing Lumumba to travel. The scene stops there, with some doubt placed on Lumumba’s radical credentials due to the possibility of friends in high colonial places. The amateur historian, however, will wonder why Lumumba’s famous embezzlement case is left unsaid. The more accomplished student might wonder, too, why Lumumba receives permission to travel for the first time. In fact, he had visited Belgium in for a month in 1955 on a government tour, after meeting King Baudouin on the latter’s Congolese trip.²¹ Lumumba was already an *évolué* (before indicated in the film) and vice-president of the Belgian Liberal Party’s Congolese branch, as well as the secretary-general of a non-Belgian union for civil servants. After meeting the King and visiting the metropole, he wrote a tract attempting an ideology for a Belgian-Congolese ‘community,’ with suffrage for literate Congolese. Therein he wrote:

I believe that it would be possible, in the relatively near future, to grant political rights to the Congolese élite and to the Belgians of the Congo ... there would be no question of granting those rights to people who were unfit for them, to dull-witted illiterates; that would be to put dangerous weapons in the hands of children.²²

On his return he was arrested for embezzling some funds – 126,000 Belgian francs or about US\$ 2 500²³ – from the post office, in which he worked as an accountant (not a mere clerk, as most biographies, and the film, assert; he had also lectured at an agricultural college!). Nationalist accounts say Lumumba’s motivation was ‘political’.²⁴ Dayal, whose version seems most detailed – and who will return to this story – writes that Lumumba admitted to the theft, beginning to repay it before the police caught him.²⁵

Why did Peck choose to ignore this story? He instead began the film when Lumumba arrives in Leopoldville from Stanleyville (now Kisangani), starting to sell beer and politics. Perhaps a few minutes of his first, less radical, career as a liberal and an embezzler (or, more kindly, an unauthorised borrower) would have detracted from the myth. However, a brief excursion into the story, and his first forays into the world of ideological prognostication, might have indicated the uncertainties of the novice philosopher-king during Africa's nationalist 'awakening'. It is doubtful that these blemishes would have cast shadows clouding the celluloid myth. Lumumba spent twelve months in prison for this misdemeanour: this seems a lengthy and 'political' sentence. Perhaps he was beaten there as in the film, where he was imprisoned for clearly political reasons, and from whence he was released for the very political reason of his invitation to the 'roundtable' in Brussels, garnered by the protests of his colleagues there negotiating independence. In any case, such an experience would be a formative one for a thirty-year-old man, worthy of inclusion in a 'true' film. Some of his frailty would have been exposed, and he could have been portrayed as a man who 'grew' with this experience.²⁶ The man who wrote *Is the Congo that Land of the Future, under Threat?*,²⁷ would be young and unsure, on the verge of discovering nationalism, but still rooted in the ideologies of gradual assimilation.

Yet half a decade later, even at his most radical, Lumumba could not transcend his class belonging. As Sartre puts it, even Lumumba's nationalism – at the time the most advanced in the country – was marred by a too recent history of 'universalisation'. The MNC's 'composition ... soon revealed its nature: it was universalist beyond ethnic groups and frontiers because its active members were people who had been universalised; in short, it was the movement of the *évolués*'.²⁸ Lumumba's dream of a huge party embracing everyone was still-born; in Sartre's poignant words: 'No one was to blame: it could not be any other way. The MNC was the Congolese petty bourgeoisie in the process of discovering its class ideology'.²⁹ Yet even Sartre was too optimistic at this point: it was not long after the MNC's birth in 1959 when the MNC-Kalonji split off its edges in Lumumba's home area. The *petite bourgeoisie* about to inherit the whole of the Congo from the colonialists was far from nationalist; indeed, it was closer to the venality indicated by Lumumba's embezzlement, and it was too eagerly following the lines of ethnicity and region to create a national project.³⁰ The point is not that Lumumba's brush with the law tarnished him forever, (although it may have left deep scars) but that this incident indicates the temptations of his class. The point *is*

that he transcended the embezzlement mode of class accumulation, and other forms of corruption. It is also that he believed the rest of his class – and all of the Congo’s ‘patriotic elements’ – could be persuaded by his reasonable logic to pursue his more rigorous path. If Sartre was correct to say Lumumba was ‘clear-sighted and blind at the same time’, the less philosophical Hoskyns was also right suggesting this broad yet too focused vision of national unity went over the heads of his class peers. He did not even see them, and most of them failed to see his vision. Thus he was seen increasingly as a ‘one-man show’ by both ‘national’ and ‘tribal’ leaders.³¹ He was, as Sartre’s puts it, a ‘Jacobin universalist’ remaining too much within his class even as he turned away from it. The ‘masses’ were rebelling against their new rulers – Lumumba’s class – and the new rulers were turning against Lumumba as they pursued their own fiefdoms (some of them very feudal: Munungo, Tshombe’s wicked henchman portrayed so precisely in the film, was the son and brother of chiefs, and wanted nothing so much as a restoration of these modes of ‘traditional’, but colonially mediated, power³²). Yet for Sartre, Lumumba did not make clear enough alliances with the subaltern classes, either: many rebelled against him too.³³

We are returned to the problem of the man=masses myth. As Sartre continues, Lumumba:

...looked upon himself as a guide, believing himself to be classless, and refusing, in his centralising zeal, to take differences of economic origin any more seriously than tribal divisions: the single Party would break down these and other barriers, and reconcile all interests.³⁴

Would this have led to some sort of socialism, thus validating many of his opposition’s – and certainly the West’s – accusations of ‘communism’? Sartre hoped yes, but feared no. Only:

...the most astute of the parliamentarians and ministers ... feared ... his Jacobinism would end in socialism by virtue of his unitary humanism. The important thing ... was that he placed his class in power and then set about governing against it. Could it have been any different? No: during the last days of colonisation, the proletariat did not do a single thing that would have made these petty bourgeois accept it as a valid interlocutor.³⁵

How might Raoul Peck have portrayed such issues? Margarethe von Trotta’s biographical film of Rosa Luxemburg illustrates such serious theoretical discussions at dinner parties and ballroom dances, inside newspaper offices, during general strikes and in prison letters.³⁶

Aside from Thomas Kanza and Maurice Mpolo – the first a voice of moderation and the latter, assassinated along with Lumumba, a spur to more radical action – there is not much strategic and ideological debate among Lumumba’s stalwarts in *Lumumba*. This may well be, of course, because he did not have many unfaltering allies. The story of Mobutu, his Judas, is more to the point, as are the angry encounters with his enemies Tshombe and Munongo in Leopoldville’s bars and dance-floors, and the stilted exchanges with the shifty Kasa Vubu. How could Peck have exposed these complex debates? He might have projected ghostly images of Sartre and Frantz Fanon in conversations, exposing the politicians’ and soldiers’ class roots with socio-political clarity and debating the merits of violence and non-violence.³⁷ Such scenes could have followed from the meeting with Fanon at the famous 1958 pan-African meeting in Accra, perhaps continuing with Fanon and Sartre discussing Lumumba. The importance of the Congo for the emerging ‘third world’ – and the Western left’s role in it – could have been thus indicated.

Another instance of Peck’s avoidance tactics might also have been addressed in such a fashion. It is related to the pride of a man who once wrote that those he thought were no better than ‘children’ do not deserve the rights of political participation. In August 1960, just weeks before Kasa Vubu stripped Lumumba of his prime minister-ship, Hoskyns reports that Lumumba banned any associations formed without government approval, as well as ‘any journal publishing material liable to bring the Government into disrespect’.³⁸ By the middle of the month – just as he decided to wage war against the secessionist Katanga and Kasai, bringing in the Soviet supplied trucks and planes and thus the knife-edge politics of the Cold War – a state of emergency was declared. Lumumba also called an All-Africa conference at this time to garner support for his battles, but given his absence from Leopoldville (he had gone to Stanleyville to gather support for his war against Tshombe and Kalonji) and the fact that foreign photographers taking pictures of crowds with anti-Lumumba banners had their cameras seized,³⁹ that succour was hard to gain. Without exposing these issues to debate, viewers and students are deprived of the chance to consider the merits of the rights to freedom of association and expression when a régime is on its last legs, or even under attack.⁴⁰

Viewers only learn of the war Lumumba started against the breakaway province of Katanga in the scene where Lumumba and Mobutu part. While Lumumba’s daughter amuses the photographer taking pictures of the prime minister for hanging in government offices (as in

Peck's mother's office in *Death of the Prophet*, Lumumba harangues Mobutu for massacring over 200 people at a Kasai mission. The audience is unsure about the nature of this war, and the actual culpability of Mobutu for the act Lumumba is portrayed as saying will lead to United Nations' accusations of genocide. Hoskyns tells us about the slaughter, which was hardly all of Mobutu's doing: sending troops to battle with no food supplies is hardly conducive to soldiers acting with 'honour',⁴¹ and Lumumba bears some blame for that.⁴² But in this scene, Mobutu takes the responsibility and reproach, while Lumumba – coming close to accusing Mobutu of allowing the killings to take place in order to discredit Lumumba – is the one who ends the friendship. Almost contextless, we are subject to the most Shakespearian moment in *Lumumba*: after his dressing down Mobutu departs in a very angry and resentful mood. Thenceforth we see him sneaking to meetings with the equally devious American ambassador, Clare Timberlake (who, we are told elsewhere, liked to call the young Prime Minister 'Lumumbavitch', emphasising his supposedly Soviet leanings⁴³). It is not long until Mobutu carries out his coup – a 'peaceful revolution', he claimed, ostensibly to bring the warring Kasa Vubu and Lumumba back together again. Was the parting really so sudden?

Death of the Prophet handles this differently. In it, Peck interviews the Polish-born French Serge Michel, on loan from the Algerian Front for National Liberation as a press attaché to Lumumba, giving the 'Western' powers reason to believe the Congolese Prime Minister had 'communist advisors'.⁴⁴ Michel offers a perfect scene to a filmmaker pursuing a more nuanced – and chaotic – portrayal of Lumumba's and Mobutu's conflict:

Mobutu was with us until the end. He spent his days with us. He ate with us, but mostly he drank. ... One evening Mobutu was late for the evening meal. ... He was moaning; he'd already drunk a lot. ... Lumumba was seated ... with two or three others, working. It was nearly midnight. Mobutu gets up and says he's going and Lumumba tells him to go to bed. So he leaves, then returns straight away ... "I need some champagne. I'm going to celebrate." Lumumba says: "You're annoying us. It's in the kitchen, serve yourself." He takes a magnum of champagne. Three-quarters of an hour later, he returns with some soldiers and says, completely drunk: "I arrest you in the name of the people". Lumumba stands up, takes him by the shoulders, turning him around and says: "Go to bed". And he did. This was the first failed coup attempt. This is to show you just what point these people had reached.

Michel also wrote of Lumumba's and his colleagues' state of mind at this juncture.⁴⁵ According to Michel, Lumumba was able to continue to function amidst such pressure 'partly by his own fantastic energy ... and partly by his almost mystical belief in himself and the role he was destined to play in the Congo'. His office was 'in complete confusion with newspapers, documents, files and letters piling up'. All sorts of people, some he hardly knew, arrived at all times 'to talk, drink, and propose wild schemes; very few came to work and when Lumumba wanted something typed he often had to do it himself'. Lumumba's group had no good intelligence: they could not tell who were informers, secret police, or even party members. Thus they became paranoid. Lumumba was 'highly nervous', found it 'difficult to concentrate or consider any subject in detail', and many thought he was using drugs. In *Lumumba* there is one scene, just after Mobutu's 'peaceful revolution', with empty champagne bottles beside Lumumba's typewriter; we know he was tired because he tells his daughter so, and we learn there may have been suspicions about him smoking hemp because his wife teasingly tells him this is why the servants say he can do with so little sleep. As for the 'almost mystical belief in himself and the role he was destined to play in the Congo', viewers do see him tell his wife to look after the children well when he is gone, and hear the letters he composed to be read after his death. The film offers us slightly sanitised visions of a man who appeared to know he would die, but also would say: 'the Congo made me, I shall make the Congo'. Thus the man=masses equation arises again. To follow the consequences of the elision, one must attempt to see how the 'one-man show' affected the efforts of international actors and institutions, as well as its cultural representations, at the time of – and after – his rise and fall.

The art and the politics of man, masses and international institutions

The relationship of the Congo to the aspects of cultural production concerning critical moments in global history is uncanny.⁴⁶ From Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* at the turn of the nineteenth century to Barbara Kingsolver's bizarre but best-selling *The Poisonwood Bible*⁴⁷ just a year short of a century later, the Congo has figured large in cultural representations of Africa's crucial transformations. Conrad's multi-layered novel – considered by some to be racist but by others to indict colonialism and imperialism⁴⁸ – was written as the colonial moment and the *belle époque* of global capitalism were reaching their

heights⁴⁹. The Congo was at the heart of these upheavals, during which, as Polanyi put it, the peoples in the periphery could not protect themselves against the ‘ravaging international trade and imperialism’ destroying ‘precapitalist communities of kinship, neighbourhood, profession and creed ... all forms of indigenous, organic society’.⁵⁰ It was also at the centre of E.D. Morel’s precursor of Amnesty International-like human rights organisations: his campaign to eradicate King Leopold’s horrendous crimes gained wide global support and shamed Britain’s parliament into commissioning a report leading to Leopold abdicating his personal fiefdom to the Congolese state.⁵¹ As the twentieth century came to a close and ‘globalisation’ reached new heights, creating particularly brutal contradictions in Africa’s heart once again, novelists, filmmakers and popular historians chose to concentrate on events of a century ago and the moment when the Cold War met the birth of the ‘third world’⁵². Adam Hochschild’s enormously successful and influential re-visiting of Leopold’s travesty of the ‘civilising mission’⁵³ appeared in 1998, as did Kingsolver’s magical post-modernist creation. Ronan Bennett’s sizzling social-realist portrayal of the Lumumba moment was published just the year before that.⁵⁴ Peck’s *Lumumba* is in good company.⁵⁵ Yet unlike these other artefacts portraying the Congo’s insertion at the centre of the world’s storms, when addressing the *realpolitik* of international relations Peck’s film seems glib. The links between the mining companies, the United States, Belgium, and especially the United Nations, are all too tight in the film to be completely convincing. More precisely, the links are assumed rather than demonstrated, and since the only personality encountered in any depth is Lumumba, we do not gain an understanding of other global actors’ motivations. We see little of the interactions between Lumumba and the representatives of these various international forces: with the Belgian ambassador, self-righteous indignation; with Timberlake, contemptuous dismissal; with the United Nations (never dignified with a personal envoy to the film), a verbal waving of the hand as the USA’s lackey, worth no more than a couple of lines of dialogue. These mini-scenes just might be Peck’s way of saying that Lumumba was too impatient for his own good, but it is Lumumba’s self-righteousness in the face of imperial onslaught that leaves its mark. Perhaps, just as Sartre said Lumumba forgot about the real class nature of the ruling group in which he was embedded, he also ignored the characteristics and contradictions of the *global* class that he had just joined. To be sure, as many observers say, he was ‘not a communist’, but he did misread the nature of the Cold War. He did not foresee the consequences of a plea for assistance from the Soviet Union.⁵⁶

Most obvious by its near absence is the film's dismissal of the United Nations.⁵⁷ If indeed Lumumba and Dag Hammarskjöld, the Secretary-General of the UN, hit it off as badly as observers say, and this led to the latter allowing Lumumba to meander to his death so easily, then the film missed a golden opportunity to illustrate how personality clashes of such a high order can have terrible consequences. If the issues were to be understood in terms of how the Republican foreign policy-making network in United States manipulated the United Nations and just about every other actor involved to clear Lumumba from the scene before a more 'third world' friendly John F. Kennedy took the fruits of the election he was about to win, then the film has failed us on that count too.⁵⁸ No matter, it seems clear that the United Nations and its Secretary-General's attempts to be 'neutralist' involved more contradictions than the film allows. In the scenes in which Lumumba, Mpolo and Okito are arrested during their escape attempt and their disembarking in Katanga, for example, we see no United Nations troops. But Ghanaian UN troops wanted to stop the arrest by Mobutu's soldiers, and there was a UN contingent at the 'non-Katanga' section of the airport able to observe the landing on the day of Lumumba's death. Conor Cruise O'Brien's dramatisation shows how the contradictions of such moments could be illustrated. *Murderous Angels* has the theatrical equivalent of Rayeshewar Dayal, the Indian head of the UN Mission, call Hammarskjöld and ask permission for the UN troops to intervene at Lumumba's arrest to save him from certain death. That permission is denied in reality and in the play. O'Brien puts the blame squarely at Hammarskjöld's feet.⁵⁹ O'Brien plays neither to the personality clash thesis, nor does he posit Hammarskjöld as the USA's puppet. Rather, his play situates both Lumumba and Hammarskjöld as caught between the two huge abstractions of 'freedom' and 'peace', only one of which could win in the Congo of the Cold War, and either of which meant the lost lives of a few people in various stations of life. Peck, however, does not consider views other than Lumumba's: a fuller array of characters would have helped to flesh out imperialism's skeletal bones.

Even a look at a representative of the most evil of empire builders might have helped viewers understand the heights of the ideological stakes around Lumumba. Assertions of cynical manipulation alone gain no insights into the motivations of quiet Americans all over the place. Ronan Bennett's *The Catastrophist* – a novel with almost as much reality on the side of its fiction as *Lumumba's* 'true story' – gives readers a closely drawn picture of the CIA man on the spot, 'Mark Stipes'. Bennett's amalgam of such sometimes rather noisy Americans

presents his ideological justification for turning against Lumumba as the novel's protagonist, James Gillespie, questions him. Gillespie has spent the night being tortured by Mobutu's henchmen with Stipes' full knowledge: they are still in the prison, beside the brutally battered corpse of a mutual acquaintance.⁶⁰ Stipes is asked what he is doing in the Congo.

"I'm trying to make this country a safe place."

"Safe for who?"

"People like you."

"Leave me out of it".

"You always want to be left out of things, Gillespie," he says scornfully, "but you're involved in this. I don't mean just because you have connections with the people we're looking for. You're involved the same way we're all involved. People like you don't like the dirty games people like me play, but you benefit every time we play and win. You won't admit it, you'd probably deny it even to yourself, but you want me to win, because if I lose, then so do you. You lose everything. All your privileges.

Writing, publishing, journalism – to mention only the things of particular interest to you – they're only possible in a certain context, and my job is to make sure that context continues to exist." ...

"What am I doing here in this country? I am making sure that the biggest and richest country in central Africa – one with huge strategic importance – doesn't fall into the hands of the people who want to destroy our context."⁶¹

Thus is portrayed the ideological zeal of the people who brought Lumumba down: this is something bigger than the Cold War for power and territory; it is for the 'context' to pursue the freedom novelists and journalists – and all for whom they write, and academics teach – enjoy in liberal democratic societies.⁶² In their minds, at least, it is more than filling the tanks of American SUVs, and grabbing the uranium for the bombs to guard them. Unless people such as Stipes are suffering from ideological illusions, it is about a tenuous balance between untrammelled and fettered power.⁶³ Such fervour, if brought to colour in *Lumumba's* not insignificant shades between black and white, would not likely dampen the viewers' support for the film's hero, or, more importantly, confuse the issues on which Peck was focussing. At the very least, delving into such other perspectives would have encouraged even more debate on the issues the film raises so very well. The questions of the morality of Western (or imperialist) 'intervention' in the name of 'democracy' in the sovereign affairs of 'developing' nation-states, especially democratically constructed ones (as Lumumba's Congo, although shaky, was) are still burning today, long after the wane of the 'Soviet threat' that

justified American and Western European imperial acts⁶⁴ – not least in the Democratic Republic of Congo, still suffering in the wake of Lumumba’s tragic death.

Lumumba must be heralded for its uncompromising examination of the execution of such interventions at their crudest, even though its hero worship threatens to make a saint out of a very human politician. Lumumba was made angelic only by the inhumanity of those believing they needed him out of the way, and who had the power to carry that ill-considered thought to reality. It does not take much to add on a few human foibles to a man many make a hero. At the end of the day, that *Lumumba* serves to create the public space for more people to make the historical and political examinations necessary to turn *all* power holders into fallible humans speaks well for a film that is in all other respects a powerful addition to its genre.

¹ Raoul Peck, *Lumumba*, (Belgium, France and Germany: ARTE France Cinema, Cinelux, Entre Chien and Loup, Essential Films, JBA Productions, Radio Television Belge Francophone, Velvet, 2000).

² Robert Rosenstone. *Visions of the Past: the Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 67–68; Kenneth Kyle, ‘Film Review Article: Lumumba’, *International Affairs*, 78, 3 (July 2002), p. 596, notices that the demonstration after which Lumumba was imprisoned is wrongly dated.

³ Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1998).

⁴ J. Ph. Peemans, ‘Capital Accumulation and State Policy: the Case of Congo’, Peter Duggan & Lewis Gann. (eds.) *Colonialism in Africa*, vol. IV. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974).

⁵ *The Quiet American*, directed by Phillip Noyce in 2001, based on Graham Greene’s novel of the same name (London: Heinemann, 1955), is excellent on this issue.

⁶ Rosenstone, *Visions*, p. 57.

⁷ Michela Wrong. *In the Footsteps of Mr. Kurtz: Living on the Brink of Disaster in the Congo*. (London: Fourth Estate, 2000), p. 3.

⁸ See David Moore, ‘War in the D.R.C.’ *New Agenda*, (Cape Town) 14, (2nd Quarter 2004), pp. 90–92 and ‘From Leopold to King Kabila: The Congo is Being Carved Up and Everyone Wants a Piece ... Again,’ *Arena*, (Melbourne) 52 (April 2001), pp. 36–39.

⁹ Rosenstone, *Visions*, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Lumumba* was made in 1999, while *Lumumba: the Death of the Prophet* was produced in 1991.

¹¹ Rosenstone, *Visions*, pp. 37–44.

¹² Rosenstone, *Visions*, pp. 29–30.

¹³ Rosenstone, *Visions*, pp. 72, 79.

¹⁴ Ludo de Witte. *The Assassination of Lumumba*, translated by Ann Wright and Renée Fendy. (London: Verso, (1999) 2001); Lucy Komisar, ‘Carlucci Can’t Hide His Role in “Lumumba”’, Pacific News Service, February 14, 2002, <<news.pacificnews.org/news/ view_article.html?article_id=882>>. Accessed February 18, 2006.

¹⁵ E.g., Kyle, ‘Film Review’; Catherine Hoskyns. *The Congo Since Independence: January 1960 December 1961*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Thomas Kanza. *Conflict in the Congo: The Rise and Fall of Lumumba*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), (Makena Diop played Kanza in the film, Lumumba’s UN representative, and a moderating influence); Rayeshwar Dayal. *Mission for Hammarskjöld: The Congo Crisis*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976); Conor Cruise O’Brien. *To Katanga and Back: A U.N. Case History*. (London: Hutchinson, 1962).

¹⁶ Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 318, 470. She adds: ‘...and by the other as a dangerous maniac who was ready to drag his country into civil war and chaos to satisfy his own ambition’.

- ¹⁷ De Witte, *The Assassination of Lumumba*, pp. 176, xxiv. Cf. Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara, who wrote after he and other Cubans tried to assist the ‘revolutionary struggle’ in the Congo in early 1965 that guerrilla leader Kabila ‘has not shown ... any of [the] qualities ... of revolutionary seriousness, an ideology that can guide action, a spirit of sacrifice that accompanies one’s actions ... essential ... [to] carry a revolution forward’. *The African Dream: The Diaries of the Revolutionary War in the Congo*, translated by Patrick Camiller. (London: Harvill, (1999) 2000), p. 244.
- ¹⁸ Guy Tillim. *Leopold and Mobutu*. (Trézélan: Filigranes, 2004); and PhotoZA, <<<http://www.photoza.co.za/guy.htm>>>.
- ¹⁹ Thierry Michel. *Mobutu: King of Zaire: An African Tragedy*. (Belgium and France: Les Films de la Passerelle, 1999).
- ²⁰ Robert J. C. Young, ‘Preface – Sartre the “African Philosopher”’, Jean-Paul Sartre. *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, translated by Azzedine Haddour, Steve Brewer and Terry McWilliams. (London: Routledge, (1964) 2001), p. x.
- ²¹ Kanza, *Conflict*, p. 28.
- ²² Quoted in David Caute. *Fanon*. (London: Fontana, 1970) p. 62, from Patrice Lumumba. *Congo my Country*, translated by G. Heath. (London: Pall Mall, 1962), p. 32.
- ²³ The American figure is a *Time* magazine estimate quoted by Dr. Lynne Waldron, who reported in the Congo in 1960: <<<http://www.dlynnwaldron.com>>>; the Belgian figure comes from David Akerman, *BBC Correspondent*, October 21, 2000, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/audio_video/programmes/correspondent/transcripts/974745.txt>>
- ²⁴ Kanza writes judiciously that ‘the Belgian and colonial press seized upon the incident as a way of discrediting him’, foreseeing his ‘rise to popularity and power’ and trying to prevent it. The political claim is made by a website called “Africa Within” in “Who Killed Lumumba?”, <<www.africawithin.com/lumumba/who_killed_lumumba.htm>>October 21, 2000. This document is heavily indebted to the BBC documentary noted above, without acknowledgement.
- ²⁵ Rayeshwar Dayal. *Mission for Hammarskjöld: The Congo Crisis*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 290–291.
- ²⁶ Peck also ignores Lumumba’s four wives. His family life is portrayed as ‘nuclear’ and ‘Western’. Would this truth have portrayed Lumumba negatively to a Western audience sympathetic to ‘third world’ causes, including ‘politically correct’ feminists? See De Witte, *The Assassination*, p. 60.
- ²⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, ‘The Political Thought of Patrice Lumumba’, Sartre, *Colonialism*, p. 158, notes that the booklet’s thought ‘is not that of the young but mature man who founded the MNC’.
- ²⁸ Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 172.
- ²⁹ Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 172.
- ³⁰ Sartre later points to the petty bourgeoisie’s tendencies to compromise with the new imperialism: he sees even a limited nationalism among them as the product of a long struggle, which would have to be led by someone like Lumumba in alliance with workers and peasants. Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, pp. 183–184, 189.
- ³¹ Hoskyns, *The Congo Since*, p. 29
- ³² O’Brien, *To Katanga*, p. 84; Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 26.
- ³³ As De Witte notes this may not be quite the case. By Lumumba’s November 27, 1960 attempt to escape to Stanleyville, troops loyal to him, organised by Antoine Gizenga, his former deputy prime minister and a more overt socialist than Lumumba, were gathering strength. By January, De Witte claims support for Lumumba was growing; this was why the Belgians demanded his move to Katanga and his sure death. For Sartre these troops were mobilised on an ethnic base, while for De Witte they were nationalists. De Witte, *The Assassination* pp. 52, 60–63; Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 179.
- ³⁴ Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 176.
- ³⁵ Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 176.
- ³⁶ Margarethe von Trotta. *Rosa Luxemburg*. (Germany: Bioskop, Bären Film, Pro-Ject Filmproduktion, Regina Ziegler Film Productions and Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 1986).
- ³⁷ Sartre, ‘The Political Thought’, p. 157.
- ³⁸ Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 189.
- ³⁹ David Macey. *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*. (New York: Picador, 2000), p. 434.
- ⁴⁰ The film does not discuss this conference. Indeed it pays scant attention to the difficulties Lumumba faced in his efforts to mobilise international support, relegating them to one scene. For an example of a

committed anti-colonialist debating with an ‘Africanist’ hero, see C.L.R. James. *Nkrumah and the Ghana Revolution*. (London: Allison and Busby, 1977).

⁴¹ To borrow a notion from Michael Ignatieff’s rather naïve *The Warrior’s Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Consciousness*. (Toronto: Penguin, 1998).

⁴² Lumumba decided to invade Katanga after the United Nations said it could not offer troops to help him defeat Tshombe’s ‘government’. He utilised Russian planes and trucks, earning the enmity of the capitalist West, as well as Belgium. The massacre was related to Baluba and Luala ‘flare-ups’, which, as O’Brien notes, occurred in close relation to the needs of Katangan politicians or European mining companies. As he puts it in a phrase useful to students of ethnicity and imperialism, ‘perhaps it is one of the age-old customs of these tribes to fight each other when there is a Republican Administration in Washington and live in peace when the Democrats are in’, O’Brien, *To Katanga*, p. 238. The film refers to ethnic issues directly only once, in the cynical words of a Belgian at the Brussels Roundtable meetings, about the impossibility of Congolese ‘nationhood’ when so many ‘tribes’ were at each others’ throats. In the next scene, in a different room, Lumumba asks the Congolese whether they will support his unitary version of the constitution or Kasa Vubu’s federalist one. Sartre notes the irony that finally, the centralist Lumumba tries to escape to his ethnic heartland, Stanleyville: but Sartre fails to note that Stanleyville was where an ideological ally, Antoine Gizenga, was more or less in control. Sartre, *The Political Thought*, p. 180.

⁴³ David Akerman, *BBC Correspondent*, 2000.

⁴⁴ Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 188–189, says Michel was a Marxist but not sympathetic to the Soviet Union. In *Prophet* he is called an anarchist. Dayal, *Mission*, p. 87 notes that Michel – ‘a leftist of doubtful vintage’ – was sent away along with other foreign advisors by Lumumba after Kasa Vubu dismissed him on September 5 1960. Another advisor, Jean Van Lierde (called a ‘pacifist’ in *Prophet*), claims in Akerman’s BBC documentary to have advised Lumumba to read the riposte to King Baudouin’s Independence Day speech, which is understandably made a key part of both films although neither mention Van Lierde’s role. There were also advisors from African countries, e.g. Andrée Blouin, Lumumba’s *chef de protocol*, loaned by Sekou Touré of Guinea. *Lumumba’s* credits thank Michel with a bracketed exclamation mark, but otherwise the film does not illustrate the European advisors. *Prophet* does. One wonders why Peck changed.

⁴⁵ Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 188, from Michel’s 1962 *Uhuru Lumumba*. Larry Devlin, CIA station agent and Mobutu advisor at the time, confirms in *Mobutu: King of Zaire* the latter’s fondness for the bottle and takes credit for taking it away.

⁴⁶ The train of thought is from my ‘From Conrad to Kabila: The Congo and ‘Our’ Consciousness,’ *Review of African Political Economy*, 82 (December 1999), pp. 529–533.

⁴⁷ Barbara Kingsolver. *The Poisonwood Bible*. (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

⁴⁸ See Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 25–28, 91.

⁴⁹ Beverly Silver & Giovanni Arrighi. ‘Polanyi’s “Double Movement”: the *Belles Epoque*s of British and US Hegemony Compared’, *Politics and Society*, 31, 2, (April 2003), pp. 325–355.

⁵⁰ Silver & Arrighi, ‘Polanyi’s’, p. 328, quoting Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*. (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1957), pp. 182–183, 207–208. Also Michael Burawoy, ‘For a Sociological Marxism: the Complementary Convergence of Antonio Gramsci and Karl Polanyi’, *Politics and Society*, 31, 2, (April 2003), p. 219.

⁵¹ Roger Casement. “The Congo Report (1903),” Barbara Harlow & Mia Carter. (eds.) *Imperialism and Orientalism: A Documentary Sourcebook*. (Malden: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 320–322.

⁵² See Kanza, *Conflict in the Congo*, 1972; O’Brien, *To Katanga*, 1962; Michel, *Uhuru*, 1962. O’Brien later wrote a play about the events around Lumumba’s assassination: *Murderous Angels: A Political Tragedy in Black and White*. (London: Hutchinson, 1968).

⁵³ Hochschild, *King Leopold’s Ghost*.

⁵⁴ Ronan Bennett. *The Catastrophist*. (London: Review, 1998). Michel Thierry’s documentary film *Mobutu: King of Zaire*, also produced in the same time period, was more contemporary than the work of his peers.

⁵⁵ See Tessa Morris-Suzuki. *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*. (London: Verso, 2005), on how the ‘popular’ media – including film – changes historical perception.

⁵⁶ The scene after which Munongo refuses Lumumba permission to land in Elisabethville has Kasa Vubu proposing to call the USSR for help, with Lumumba refusing, only to raise the idea again. I have seen no sources confirming this. Hoskyns, *The Congo*, p. 189, guesses that the Guineans in Leopoldville suggested

the idea. Dayal, *Mission*, p. 61, reports Lumumba hiring an American entrepreneur to ‘develop’ huge swathes of the country. UN advisors cautioned against this, so he cancelled. This decidedly un-communist economic management is prescient: Laurent-Désiré Kabila signed shady deals with American mining entrepreneurs as he marched across the Congo in 1996 and 1997: see David Moore, ‘The Political Economy of the DRC Conflict,’ *The War Economy in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, Sagaren Naidoo, ed. IGD Occasional Paper No. 37, Institute for Global Dialogue: Johannesburg, September 2003, pp. 16–39.

⁵⁷ Kenneth Kyle makes the same point in ‘Film Review’, p. 596, without elaboration.

⁵⁸ A conspiracy theorist would see the American Andrew Cordier’s placement in Leopoldville as a temporary UN chief of operations, pending Indian diplomat Rayeshwar Dayal’s arrival, as part of a plan to pre-empt Kennedy’s inauguration. Cordier gave over five million francs to Mobutu to pay the troops, ensuring their loyalty just as Kasa Vubu, probably in consultation with Cordier, removed Lumumba from the prime ministership. Cordier declared the radio station closed to politicians in the name of peace and order, but allowed Kasa Vubu to use one across the river in Brazzaville. Cordier also closed the airports, but allowed Kasa Vubu’s choice as prime minister to fly to Leopoldville. The more ‘neutralist’ Dayal arrived too late to stop such interventions. In *Lumumba*, American ambassador Timberlake is seen wooing Mobutu, assuring him of support from either Eisenhower or Kennedy.

⁵⁹ O’Brien, *Murderous Angels*, p. 118, and his appendix, pp. 200–204. O’Brien, clearly sympathetic to Lumumba, arrived in Katanga shortly after Lumumba’s death. He soon took precipitous and forceful action to annul Katanga’s secession, and thus may have inadvertently played a role in Hammarskjöld’s death by plane crash if one believes Tshombe or Munungo arranged the crash of Hammarskjöld’s plane as he flew to Ndola to meet them. O’Brien resigned his post. See David Gibbs, ‘The United Nations, International Peacekeeping and the Question of “Impartiality:” Revisiting the Congo Operation of 1960’, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 38, 3 (September 2000), pp. 359–382.

⁶⁰ Bennett himself has been in prison twice, incorrectly accused of activities for the Irish Republican Army.

⁶¹ Bennett, *The Catastrophist*, pp. 270–271.

⁶² Ludo de Witte’s *The Assassination of Lumumba* and Michela Wrong’s interviews with Larry Devlin in *In the Footsteps*, suggest that the CIA did not actually assassinate Lumumba (Devlin claims to have thrown away the poisoned toothpaste). The CIA seems to have lost some of its initial passion for the task, delegating it to the Belgians with Tshombe and Munongo. However, it played a very large role in the ‘pre-planning’ of the murder, as the film shows correctly (so much so that Frank Carlucci, the American second secretary who said in the ‘send the Jew to Satan’ scene that the USA does not interfere in other nations’ sovereignty, forced Home Box Office to remove the utterance of his name from the film: Komisar, ‘Carlucci Can’t Hide’). As Stephen Weissman put it, the CIA must take ‘significant responsibility’ for the assassination although it ‘may not have exercised robotic control’. Later authorising \$500,000 to the people who were behind the killing surely indicates support for it, too. Stephen Weissman, ‘Opening the Secret Files on Lumumba’s Murder’, *Washington Post*, 21 July, 2002.

⁶³ Bennett’s subsequent novel, based in medieval England, raises the question of power and its justification with the words of a town master whose power is slipping: ‘I have no ambition for anything other than the good government of the town and the reformation of its people. Those who allege otherwise forge pretexts for faction and sedition.’ *Havoc in the Third Year*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

⁶⁴ An ultimately unsatisfactory attempt to deal with these issues is Micheal Ignatieff’s *The Lesser Evil: Political Ethics in an Age of Terror*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005).