



Katanga: Congo's Perpetual Trouble Spot

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Katanga, a former province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), has experienced several periods of violent social and political upheaval since the colonial era. Multiple cleavages, Katanga's mineral wealth, local obsessions with autochthony and autonomy ambitions, have all been sources of tension. In July 2015, the province was split up into four smaller, socioeconomically unequal entities. This policy brief discusses recent political developments in former Katanga in the context of an overhasty initiation of the decentralisation process and the general political crisis caused by President Kabila's reluctance to give up power.

INTRODUCTION

The political destiny of the Katanga region has been at the heart of Congolese politics since the colonial period. Its mineral rich soil and the partition of revenues have caused rivalries between central governments and local authorities, and have triggered conflicts between local communities often fueled by autochthony claims. Political, socioeconomic and ethnic/regional cleavages make Katanga one of the most conflict-prone regions of the DRC.

The recent subdivision of the province, contested by several local elites, and the fact that many of President Joseph Kabila's political allies in Katanga have joined the opposition, are not helping to defuse the tense situation in Congo's richest region. Katanga was once Kabila's electoral and economic stronghold. However, it appears that Kabila may be losing his grip on the situation as Katanga is more politically divided than ever.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Katanga's turbulent history is closely connected with its industrialisation and economic development, which started with the exploitation of mineral resources in southern Katanga by the colonial company *Union Minière du Haut-Katanga*. The rise of industry caused massive migration towards the mining sites: workers were recruited from neighbouring provinces, in particular Kasai. In the 1950s, the *Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga* (CONAKAT), an umbrella organisation for several 'autochthonous' Katangan ethnic associations, fostered the idea of the Katangan identity and strove to gain political and economic control over the province after candidates from Kasai won the first communal elections in Elisabethville (Lubumbashi) and Jadotville (Likasi). BALUBAKAT, the association of Lubakat from North Katanga, decided to ally with the centralist party *Mouvement National Congolais* of Patrice Lumumba, Congo's first prime minister.

CONAKAT's proclamation of the secession of Katanga shortly after Congo's independence incited a civil war between South (controlled by CONAKAT) and North Katanga (dominated by BALUBAKAT). Events in the late 1950s and early 1960s demonstrated the existence of center/periphery (centralist versus federalist vision), ethnic/regional (CONAKAT dominated by Ruund/Lunda versus BALUBAKAT), and socioeconomic (industrialised south versus agrarian north) cleavages in Katanga, as well as the emergence of 'autochthony'/'allochthony' ('originaires'/'non-originaires') dichotomies. These cleavages have persisted through recent decades. In 1990, President Mobutu re-introduced multipartism under pressure from the international community. The *Union des Fédéralistes et des Républicains Indépendants* (UFERI), a party led in Katanga by Gabriel Kyungu Wa Kumwanza,ⁱ called for more autonomy for Katanga and instigated the expulsion of migrants originating from Kasai. The latter were accused of stealing jobs from 'autochthons', and supported the *Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social* (UDPS), a rival opposition party led by Etienne Tshisekedi. Following this ethnic cleansing, the redistribution of spoils among 'autochthons' caused tensions between southerners (e.g., Bemba, Lamba, Sanga) and northerners (Lubakat), the latter being blamed for profiting from the riches of the south (since 1991 five of seven governors have been Lubakat). When Moïse Katumbi (a southerner) was governor (2007–2015), some Lubakat elites accused him of neglecting the north.ⁱⁱ

President Laurent-Désiré Kabila, a native from Katanga, seized power in May 1997 with the help of Rwanda. When he turned against the Rwandans in 1998, he created and supported armed groups in Katanga to resist the Rwandan forces, together with other Lubakat such as Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, General John Numbi and former governor Ngoy Mukena. Members of these groups were never demobilised and re-emerged later in obscure Mai-Mai militias which terrorised local populations. Kata-Katanga, one of these groups, relaunched the

secessionist idea, claiming to fight for an independent Katanga.ⁱⁱⁱ

DECENTRALISATION AND THE DÉCOUPAGE

The constitution of 18 February 2006 mandates the decentralisation of power and the creation of 26 new provinces from 11 existing ones (territorial 'découpage'), with a transfer of political and fiscal competences to the new administrative entities. Decentralisation is meant to improve administrative efficacy and democratic participation, accommodate local community interests, and facilitate conflict resolution.^{iv}

In February 2015, a law determining the modalities for the installation of new provinces was promulgated and on 16 July 2015 the former Katangan parliament adopted the break-up of Katanga into the provinces of Haut-Katanga, Lualaba, Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika. In March 2016, the new governors were elected. Districts have been transformed into provinces with the exception of Kolwezi, which has been attached to Lualaba. According to article 226 of the constitution, the decentralisation should have been implemented by May 2010. The process was never initiated (officially due to budget issues), and in early 2011 the constitution was revised, effectively postponing decentralisation until an unknown point in the future. Several politicians and ethnic leaders in Katanga have contested the decentralisation project for various socioeconomic and political reasons.

THE GAP BETWEEN NORTH AND SOUTH KATANGA

A socioeconomic gap exists between the southern provinces of Lualaba and Haut-Katanga, where the large-scale mining industry is concentrated, and northern Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika, agricultural provinces with only small-scale and artisanal mining activities. The

north suffers from bad roads, whereas in the south, as a result of industrialisation, infrastructure is much better developed, connecting the cities Kolwezi, Likasi and Lubumbashi with Zambia. According to a 2010 World Bank report, only Haut-Katanga and Lualaba-Kolwezi would be financially viable provinces.^v

Several Lubakat leaders have opposed decentralisation, fearing that it would further impoverish and marginalise ‘their’ Haut-Lomami and Tanganyika provinces. Kyungu Wa Kumwanza was one of the fiercest opponents, advocating the Katangan identity and striving for an autonomous Katanga. A petition against the ‘découpage’, highlighting the economic discrepancy between the new provinces and the potential for inter-community conflicts, was signed in 2009 by high-ranking Lubakat politicians. The youth division of *Buluba-i-Bukata*, the ethnic socio-cultural association of Lubakat, wrote an open letter in 2010 accusing the southerner Jean-Claude Kazembe Musonda (defender of decentralisation and currently governor of Haut-Katanga), of ‘having declared that all Lubakat should go back to their region, leaving the Lamba their paradise’.^{vi}

Due to the dissolution of Katanga province, the Katangan identity is losing relevance, although some believe that it will endure. Fondation Katangaise, the provincial umbrella organisation for ‘autochthonous’ Katangan ethnic associations, is continuing its activities and promotion of the Katangan identity, and Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, president of the former Katangan parliament, declared on 16 July 2015 that the Katangan administration has been split, but ‘Katanganité’ has not.^{vii} However, new provinces might form the basis for the invention of new identities, catalysing the emergence of new ‘originaires’/‘non-originaires’ dichotomies. Kyungu Wa Kumwanza could thereby become a

victim of his own xenophobic ideology: as a resident of Lubumbashi, now capital of Haut-Katanga, he could be stigmatised as a ‘non-originaire’ of Haut-Katanga.

LUALABA PROVINCE: CAUSE OF INTER-COMMUNITY DISPUTES

In the run-up to the constitutional referendum of 2005, the Independent Electoral Commission issued a vulgarising document explaining the constitution and presenting a map of the ‘découpage’, showing Kolwezi and Haut-Katanga districts forming Haut-Katanga province.^{viii} The map has changed since then and Kolwezi has been attached to Lualaba district to create Lualaba province. The discussion about Kolwezi’s future has triggered emotional reactions. Leaders of *Lwanzo Lwa Mikuba*, the ethnic socio-cultural association of Sanga, rejected the idea of a merger between Kolwezi and Lualaba, and advocated either the creation of Kolwezi province or a merger with Haut-Katanga, because of what they claim to be their longstanding and close cultural relationship with communities from this district. Lwanzo leaders consider Sanga the autochthons of the mineral-rich Kolwezi district and have contended that they are economically and politically marginalised by members of the Tshota communities (Ruund, Tshokwe, Ndembu, Minungu and Lwena) who originate from the agrarian Lualaba district but who live and work in Kolwezi.^{ix} In recent years, the association has claimed jobs in the administration and private mining companies, and supported the demands of local artisanal miners for exploitation concessions. This has led to social tension. Tshota leaders accused Lwanzo of political tribalism and argued that Lualaba province is not economically viable without Kolwezi.^x Vano Kiboko, chairman of Lwanzo and former Member of Parliament for Joseph Kabila’s *Parti Populaire pour la Reconstruction et Développement* (PPRD), was arrested in December 2014, some

weeks after Lwanzo organised a protest march against the Kolwezi–Lualaba merger. Kiboko was accused of fanning tribal hatred and disturbing public order. He was released from jail in May 2016, and shortly afterwards Kakoma Mwanza succeeded him as Lwanzo chairman.^{xi} Richard Muyej (PPRD), former Minister of the Interior and Decentralisation and Ruund has been elected governor of Lualaba province, and Fifi Masuka (FIDEC), president of the association of Ndembu, has been appointed vice-governor.

ELECTIONS AND THE KATANGAN IDENTITY

The imagined Katangan identity was an important factor in the presidential elections of 2006 and 2011. Due to the revision of the constitution in early 2011, the illusion of Katangan unity was maintained at least for a while, and opposition to the ‘découpage’ from Katangan politicians was temporarily neutralised. It is clear that President Joseph Kabila would not have benefited electorally from a divided Katanga. Kabila is considered a Katangan because his father Laurent-Désiré was a Lubakat. Consequently, he is a member of *Buluba-i-Bukata*. In 2006 and 2011 he won a substantial portion of his votes in Katanga. In early 2011, *Buluba-i-Bukata* organised a conference in North Katanga in support of Kabila’s candidacy that was attended by high-ranking Lubakat members. As northerners felt ignored by the government during Kabila’s first term, the meeting was also meant to reassure them that the president would make a priority of the infrastructure in North Katanga.

After the elections of 2011, however, several Lubakat elites were disappointed. Jean-Claude Masangu, often mentioned as a likely candidate for prime minister, was not nominated (instead Matata Ponyo was appointed). Daniel Mulunda Ngoy was dismissed as chairman of the

Independent National Electoral Commission after being blamed for the contested elections of 2011. John Numbi was officially replaced as national police chief after being suspended for suspected involvement in the assassination of human rights activist Floribert Chebeya. An internal division within the Lubakat community seemed imminent, and in February 2013 a special assembly of *Buluba-i-Bukata* was organised in Lubumbashi in order to try to close ranks. UN experts also suggest that in recent years John Numbi has logistically supported the Kata-Katanga militia held responsible for much of the violence in the so-called ‘triangle of death’ (Manono-Mitwaba-Pweto); Kata-Katanga could also have served the interests of local political and economic elites.^{xii}

Political nervousness in Katanga has been fueled by uncertainty about the president’s ambition to run for a third term (the constitution allows only two terms), attempts by the majority to change the electoral law – and other creative maneuvers to postpone the presidential elections of November 2016 and extend Kabila’s current term – as well as the hasty implementation of decentralisation, which achieved little more than the ‘découpage’.

Several Katangan politicians have left the majority, including Jean-Claude Muyambo (SCODE), Kyungu Wa Kumwanza (UNAFEC), Charles Mwando (UNADEF), Dany Banza (ACO) and Moïse Katumbi (PPRD). Kumwanza, Mwando and Banza joined the G7 opposition, which asked President Kabila to respect the constitution with regard to the upcoming elections.^{xiii} In May 2016, Katumbi announced his candidacy for the presidential elections, with support from the G7. Both Muyambo and Katumbi are being prosecuted over fraud charges: Muyambo, once one of Kabila’s ministers, was imprisoned, whereas Katumbi left the country.^{xiv} In June 2016,

Tshisekedi and Katumbi's brother Katebe Katoto organised a meeting of several opposition leaders in Genval, Belgium. This meeting resulted in the foundation of a coalition of opposition forces, *Rassemblement*, and the reconciliation between the former archenemies Tshisekedi and Kyungu Wa Kumwanza (Katumbi did not participate, but is considered one of the sponsors of the meeting).^{xv}

Not only have ethnic associations suffered from internal division as a result of the current political crisis: some political parties have broken up into majority and G7 branches, further fragmenting the political landscape in the DRC and Katanga. UNAFEC and UNADEF left the presidential majority under leadership of their respective founders, Kyungu Wa Kumwanza and Charles Mwando, but factions loyal to the government split off.

MOÏSE KATUMBI

Although the governors of the four new provinces are members of the majority, it is clear from the above that in the very unlikely case that Kabila runs for a third term, he would not be able to unite (former) Katanga once again behind his candidacy; the dissension and frustrations have simply grown too strong.

Currently, Moïse Katumbi is seen as a plausible presidential candidate whose popularity seems to extend beyond Katanga due to his charisma, entrepreneurial spirit and the fact that he is president of Tout Puissant Mazembe, the most successful football team of the DRC (although his sentence is complicating his position). He was especially popular as governor of Katanga, gaining support from Katanga's elites, the provincial parliament and its speaker Kyungu Wa Kumwanza. This popularity, however, also troubled his relationship with Kabila, who started seeing Katumbi as a political competitor.^{xvi} Katumbi was particularly popular

in the south where infrastructure and urban development took place, but was also accused of neglecting the north. Following Katanga's break-up, Katumbi would also have to deal with the waning Katangan identity. As a presidential candidate, Katumbi will most probably be supported by Sempya: he was president of this ethnic association of the Bemba in 2006 and since then has been its main sponsor. However, the question remains as to what the position of governor Kazembe Musonda (PPRD) will be within the association: Musonda was one of the founders of *Espace Sempya-Lwanzo*, a strategic alliance between Lwanzo and Sempya. Katumbi and Musonda, both natives of Kashobwe in the territory of Kasenga, are now political opponents within the same ethnic association. Could this possibly result in a split of Sempya along the majority/opposition cleavage?

CONCLUSION

Several factors determine the socio-political climate in former Katanga: (1) the concomitance of regional, ethnic and social cleavages, (2) the hasty and ill-considered implementation of decentralisation and its consequences for communities in former Katanga; (3) the growing opposition from former political allies of Kabila in Katanga, (4) the political involvement of ethnic socio-cultural associations, and (5) the presence of obscure rural militia, party and ethnic association youth divisions and supporters' clubs, which can be manipulated by local strongmen.

In order to find a solution for the political impasse in the DRC, it is necessary that all parties concerned work together towards a consensus on credible elections within acceptable time limits. However, the opposite seems to be happening as the majority, the opposition and international community adopt a wait-and-see policy.^{xvii} The opposition against Kabila is growing, but opposition parties and

movements form only a loose alliance, which is in any case a tactical one, not a strategic or ideological one, without a coherent programme for the future. The national dialogue appears stillborn, as an important fraction of the opposition declines to participate. Crucial dates in the next few weeks are: 27 November 2016, the day on which the elections were due to be held, and 19 December 2016, when Kabila's second term officially ends. If no progress is made by then in terms of a consensual electoral agenda, transparency regarding Kabila's position, and credible political programmes, a repetition of the violent confrontations is likely in Kinshasa and other major cities. In view of the cleavages described here, emotions might run high in former Katanga as well. Taking into account the economic importance of the region, escalating political unrest in the former province can further destabilize the DRC.

In order to maintain stability in former Katanga in the long term, it will be necessary to make sure that decentralisation is implemented properly, guaranteeing fair conditions for all communities and regions. Central and local governments and international development partners should collaborate in a constructive way to make sure that the most vulnerable regions and communities receive structural support to avoid further impoverishment and discrimination, and enable them to become more autonomous. This means supporting

sustainable agricultural and infrastructure development in the northern provinces, providing local communities with adequate educational programmes adapted to local economic activities, stimulating economic collaboration between northern and southern provinces in order to reduce the socioeconomic gap, and aiming for more diversified industrial activity to make the region less dependent on mineral extraction (and economically less vulnerable). Stimulating agricultural, industrial and educational initiatives in economically marginalised rural and urban regions can result in employment creation for local communities, in particular for the youth. Young people feel valued and have a future when there are jobs. This would empower them and make them less susceptible to manipulation and mobilisation by rural militia and urban ethnic or political organisations.

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Kyungu Wa Kumwanza, a Lubakat, was governor of Katanga from 1991 to 1995. In the 2000s he founded *Union Nationale des Fédéralistes du Congo* (UNAFEC), a party that joined Joseph Kabila's majority (in the run-up to the elections of 2011, supporters of UNAFEC and the opposition party UDPS clashed in Lubumbashi, then the capital of Katanga). He was speaker of the Katangan parliament until the break-up of Katanga.
- ⁱⁱ In May 2010, 14 Lubakat elites accused Moïse Katumbi in an open letter of having tampered with the provincial budget for infrastructure in the northern districts.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Berghezan, G. (2015) *Groupes armés au Katanga. Epicentre de multiples conflits*. Rapport du GRIP 2015/3.
- ^{iv} Liégeois, M. (2008) *La Décentralisation en RD Congo. Enjeux et Défis*. Rapport du GRIP 2008/1.
- ^v World Bank (2010) *Democratic Republic of Congo. The Impact of the 'Découpage'*. Report no. 50675-ZR. Available at: http://www-wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2010/10/26/000333037_20101026003725/Rendered/PDF/506750ESW0P1041Box353763B001PUBLIC1.pdf.
- ^{vi} Kazembe Musonda, J.C. (2009) *Le découpage du Katanga: nouvelle expérience & nouvelles opportunités*. Kinshasa: Editions Shaloom; the open letter was published under the title 'Kazembe Musonda: un pyromane?' in the newspaper *Quiproquo*, 5 January 2010.
- ^{vii} Gobbers, E. (2016) 'Ethnic associations in Katanga province, the Democratic Republic of Congo: multi-tier system, shifting identities and the relativity of autochthony'. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 211-236; *Radio Okapi* (2015) 'Le Katanga officiellement démembré en quatre nouvelles provinces', 16 July. Available at: <http://www.radiookapi.net/actualite/2015/07/16/le-katanga-officiellement-demembre-en-quatre-nouvelles-provinces>.
- ^{viii} Independent Electoral Commission (2005) *Comprendre le Projet de Constitution. Petit Guide de Vulgarisation*. October 2005. Available at: <http://www.droitcongolais.info/files/Droit-constitutionnel-explique-par-la-CEI.pdf>.
- ^{ix} Gobbers, E. (2016) 'Ethnic associations in Katanga province, the Democratic Republic of Congo: multi-tier system, shifting identities and the relativity of autochthony'. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 54, no. 2, pp. 211-236.
- ^x Kovijaan (2007) *A qui revient la ville de Kolwezi? Question d'actualité*. Lubumbashi : Editions Neema.
- ^{xi} Kakoma was elected chairman of a shadow committee in 2013 by dissidents within Lwanzo who contested Vano Kiboko's authority and adopted a more pragmatic stance towards the 'découpage'.
- ^{xii} UN Security Council (2014) *Final report of the Congo group of experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo*. 23 January. S/2014/42; International Crisis Group (2016) *Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*. 3 August. Africa Report no. 239.
- ^{xiii} *Jeune Afrique* (2015) RDC: sept dirigeants de la majorité présidentielle accusent Kabila de 'stratégie suicidaire'. 15 September. Available at: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/264453/politique/rdc-sept-dirigeants-de-majorite-rappellent-a-lordre-president-kabila-elections/>.
- ^{xiv} After being accused of recruiting foreign mercenaries in May 2016, Moïse Katumbi was allowed to leave the DRC for South Africa for medical treatment. In June 2016, he was sentenced in absentia to three years in prison for real estate fraud.
- ^{xv} International Crisis Group (2016) *Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*. 3 August. Africa Report no. 239; Wondo, J.J. (2016) *La rencontre de tous les enjeux à Genval: vers l'unité de l'opposition congolaise?*. DESC-WONDO.ORG. 9 June. Available at: <https://desc-wondo.org/fr/opinion-la-rencontre-de-tous-les-enjeux-a-genval-vers-lunite-de-lopposition-congolaise-jj-wondo/>
- ^{xvi} International Crisis Group (2016) *Katanga: Tensions in DRC's Mineral Heartland*. 3 August. Africa Report no. 239.
- ^{xvii} Berwouts, K. (2016) DR Congo's electoral process is at an impasse. Here are three scenarios for what comes next. *African Arguments*. 22 May. Available at: <http://africanarguments.org/2016/05/22/dr-congos-electoral-process-is-at-an-impasse-here-are-3-scenarios-for-what-comes-next/>



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