'LA CRISE': LEXICON AND ETHOS OF THE SECOND ECONOMY IN LUBUMBASHI

Pierre Petit

Georges Mulumbwa Mutambwa

Vying with South Africa and Nigeria in the 1960s for political and economic leadership in Africa, Congo (DRC) now comes to mind as a paradigm of informalization and criminalization of the state and the economy. As Janet MacGaffey demonstrated about fifteen years ago, however, compared with certain of its neighbours, Congo was not a truly exceptional case; a 'second' or 'informal' economy was already common in many African countries (MacGaffey et al. 1991: 15–19). What is peculiar to Congo is the nature of the state in which this underground economy has developed: a state fundamentally marked by thirty-two years of patrimonialism under Mobutu's regime (1965–97) – which led the country to bankruptcy and a virtual disappearance from international economic statistics – and by six years of civil war (from 1998) implicating notably Rwanda and Uganda as well as numerous other African countries.

Life in Congo is profoundly affected by this precarious context. Virtually all the state's usual attributes have been influenced by informal privatization (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001a): public officials – or those pretending to be – have taken over the customary functions and prerogatives of the state, selling their services to their 'customers' (as police officers in Lubumbashi call plaintiffs, for example). The Congolese rely less and less on the state for services, and increasingly resort to their own initiative when facing everyday problems such as the procurement of food, water, shelter or education. Recent work by Theodore Trefon (2004a, 2004b) demonstrates that far from adopting a passive attitude, Kinshasa's inhabitants have developed a strong sense of inventiveness and determination to 'reinvent order' amid this apparent chaos. A song by Koffi Olomide, quoted by the same author, sums up the Congolese stance on their present situation: 'We are in hell, the fire is burning but we are not all burnt up!' (Trefon 2004c: 15).

Pierre Petit research associate at the Belgian FNRS, teaches at the University of Brussels. After completing his Ph.D. on the rituals of the Luba-Katanga (Congo), he carried out new fieldwork among the Luba and the Bwile (Zambia) about material culture, identity and tradition. He was one of the initiators (in 2000) of the Observatoire du changement urbain at the University of Lubumbashi (UNILU) and has recently edited two books resulting from its research.

Georges Mulumbwa Mutambwa is senior assistant in linguistics at the University of Lubumbashi. After five years in community development, he now works for the Observatoire du changement urbain. He has been in charge of socio-anthropological surveys for UNICEF and the World Bank. His numerous publications stress the link between social settings and linguistic data.
But confronted with la crise – the crisis, the term most widely used to describe the present situation, especially in the field of economy – some simply cannot cope. The city-dwellers of Lubumbashi have even coined a new word, criseurs, to refer to people so impoverished that they are unable to make ends meet. Highlighting the resourcefulness and creativity of the informal economy, nonetheless, should not overshadow the misery that is at once part of its origin and part of its consequences.

The present situation, perceived by the population as apocalyptic, yet confronted with humour, accurately illustrates Mbembe’s assertion that Africa questions the notion of the toppling of the worlds (‘le basculement des mondes’): ‘fluctuations, volatility and indeterminacy do not necessarily amount to disorder, and any representation of an unstable world cannot be subsumed under the appellation of chaos’ (Mbembe 2000: 20). The object of this article is precisely to bring to light some patterns underlying the fend-for-yourself way of living. More precisely, we will address the urban economy of Lubumbashi, the former industrial heart of the country, using the concept of moral economy for drawing the focus to the actors’ point of view about their own practices, and to their moral judgements about them. This approach allows us to determine how specific economic activities are embedded in social life through reference to commonly shared codes and values (Olivier de Sardan 1996: 98).

For reasons we will explain later, we will tackle the topic through the crisis vocabulary, taking some major expressions of the second economy commonly heard in Lubumbashi. From this corpus – which testifies to the enormous lexical creativity and ease with which the Congolese master and play with their language – we shall map new economic practices and try to figure out the new moral order that underlies the system. We shall conclude with a reflection upon the popular representations of the state, the economy and accumulation of wealth. Our argument is that a system does indeed exist and that the concept of moral economy is instrumental in deciphering how it functions.

The links between ethics and economy in contemporary Congo have been recently brought to the fore by De Boeck (2003), who writes about the diamond ‘hunters’ at the border between Congo and Angola. This traffic does not merely disrupt the former social order (although this may be part of its effects): it also contributes to the rise of new forms of masculine self-realization, and to a reinvention of the rural ethics of control, responsibility and sharing. Similarly, relating to war economics in Congo, Jackson (2002, 2003) has shown how informal mining in Kivu has become a local ethical issue. What is at stake in these articles, as in ours, is that the opportunistic, aggressive economic activities developed in the present misery of Congo do not lead to anomie and individualism.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Elisabethville was founded in 1910 and rebaptized Lubumbashi in 1967 after the river flowing near its centre. Its primary function was to serve
as a pole for the nascent mining industry of southern Katanga and to shelter the great railway station where the line ended after having left the Cape and climbed through Southern Africa and Rhodesia; it also constituted a landmark of the Belgian presence before the British sphere of influence (Fetter 1979).

Elisabethville was created *ex nihilo*, according to a chequerboard plan that would crystallize Belgian colonial apartheid: the ‘white town’ was scrupulously separated from the townships (*cités indigènes*) where the employed Africans dwelled. The town lived according to the rhythm of major state enterprises, the most important of which was the Union Minière – rebaptized Gecamines in 1972 – which prospered into the 1970s despite many crises. After independence in 1960, Elisabethville was the capital of the ephemeral Independent State of Katanga (1960–63). Shortly after the resolution of this secession, Joseph Mobutu organized the 1965 *coup d'état* with Western backing, which made him the uncontested master of the country. The Katangese identity carried a certain stigma; the mining province was still suspected of harbouring secessionist ambitions, and was in a retaliatory gesture rebaptized ‘Shaba’, a name that persisted until the end of the Mobutist regime. The relation between Lubumbashi and the capital, Kinshasa, has been one of rivalry. In the colonial era, white settlers in Elisabethville referred to Katanga as the industrious ‘lung’ of the colony while Leopoldville was despised for its bureaucratic arrogance, a stereotype that persisted and developed after independence with Mobutu’s centralization of public affairs in Kinshasa. In its early phase, this regime was a paradigmatic example of postcolonial authoritarianism in Africa, with its triptych of violence, allocation of salary as ‘reward’ (rather than as a formal recompense for working) and transfer of benefits for sustaining one’s clientele (Mbembe 2000: 73–78). It turned more and more to pure nepotism, kleptocracy and corruption, yet was long supported by Western powers, as Zaïre was an ally in the Cold War.

Over the decades, the country drifted towards bankruptcy (De Herdt 2002). Gecamines, the main provider of hard currency for the country, had been ruthlessly exploited to meet the regime’s cash needs. This resulted in inferior and short-sighted management strategies, which eventually led to the general decline of the industry and the literal collapse of the Kamoto mine at the beginning of the 1990s (Rubbers 2004). Deprived of this main source of income, and cornered by political pressures with the end of the Cold War, Mobutu made a series of political overtures in April 1990 (de Villers and Omasombo 2004). But soon after, in May, the world at large was shocked by a reported massacre of students in Lubumbashi. Discussions with former students who were on the campus at the time indicate that there was no ‘massacre’ in the proper sense of the term but a very violent military retaliation against those who had assaulted agents of the regime: it resulted in one firmly established case of homicide. Nonetheless, these bloody events were used by the political opposition as proof of Mobutu’s continuing tyranny. Relayed by the international press, they eventually led to the cessation of international cooperation with Zaïre.
In October 1991, Lubumbashi was the scene of mass looting at the hands of mutinous soldiers, as Kinshasa had experienced just before. This brought commercial ruin, mass job losses and a halt in supplies, taking the town to the brink of disaster. Some politicians seized this opportunity to exacerbate the resentment between the Katangese and the Kasai populations in the mining province, resulting in hundreds of thousands of the latter being expelled. Lubumbashi itself was spared such mass expulsion.

Despite—and partly because of—these tragic events, Mobutu was able to remain in place until 1997, when Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s advance, begun the previous year, put a halt to Mobutu’s thirty-two-year-old regime. Kabila was given a hero’s welcome in Lubumbashi: he himself came from the north of the province. But peace would not last longer than one year: the present conflict (since 1998) has divided Katanga in two for approximately five years, with the rebels holding the north of the province. It has increased the informalization process as most of the state’s resources have been diverted to the war effort. It is also clear that the adversaries benefit from drawing out the conflict at a low level, as this allows for easier exploitation of the country’s resources (Samset 2002).

Laurent-Désiré Kabila’s assassination in January 2001 and the taking over of functions by his son, Joseph, have frozen the hostilities. Since then, diplomatic talks have progressed, and a government including the different factions and interest groups has been constituted, but the possibility of regular elections seems distant, since fighting continues in some provinces, and two coups d’état were reported in 2004. The future remains unclear.

ECONOMIC MUTATIONS

This brief historical retrospective was necessary to understand the background against which the Lushois (the people of Lubumbashi) assess their present economic condition. The comments of people questioned about their own pasts for a recent exhibition about urban memory almost invariably revolve around the difference between a prosperous and happy past until the 1970s, when salaried employment and access to commodities were available to all, and a sinister present (Sizaire 2001). This is not merely the effect of nostalgia.

In the past, the town lived according to the rhythm of the Union Minière/Gecamines, which regulated the lives of its personnel from birth to death: the company housed and fed them, sent missions to the countryside to seek spouses for the workers, educated their children, planned their leisure and so on (Dibwe 2001). A proverb stated that ‘the Union Minière [or alternatively: salaried work] is the father and the mother’ (Union Minière [kajï] njo baba, njo mama). Lubumbashi typified the model African mining town with its strong paternalistic and bureaucratic order. Currently Gecamines has practically shut down, and copper or cobalt products are extracted manually by craft-diggers (‘creuseurs’), now a flourishing activity, bringing benefit for
many but unable to generate wealth for the whole city as did the industry of yesteryear (Rubbers 2004: 32–36). This abrupt change brought tremendous effects on everyday life, especially on gender and age relations, since heads of households lost their central role in the economic activities of the family (Dibwe 2001).

In 1973, 85 per cent of the active population of Lubumbashi was employed (Houyoux and Lecoanet 1975). In a survey conducted in 2000, with a sample of eighty-four households picked at random throughout the town, seventy-eight heads of household were active at the time of the study, but only thirty-three (i.e. 42 per cent) were employed (Petit 2003: 224). The size of the employed sector appears even lower if we take into consideration the other activities performed by all family members to cover the needs that a single salary cannot. In the same sample, we calculated that only a minority of households could claim a single source of income, most (81 per cent) declaring two or more. Another edifying figure: 64 per cent of the households declared practising some form of commerce. Rural activities have increased in amplitude over the last years: 17 per cent of the heads of household declared agriculture, the charcoal trade or similar activities as being their primary trade (Petit 2003: 217–18). White- and blue-collar workers have increasingly given way to tradesmen or neo-rural people. It could be said, taking a metaphor from Ulf Hannerz (1980: 280), that Lubumbashi has turned from a 'hedgehog town' into a 'fox town', meaning that from an urban model, fully focused on a central activity – the mining industry in this case – it has become an urban model centred on a diversity of roles.

This diversification has meant, on the one hand, a growth in pre-existent non-salaried positions in the job market (micro-trader, market gardeners, repairmen of all sorts . . .), a similar increase in many forms of illegal traffic, and the birth of a multitude of new professions: khadafis (fuel traffickers, taking their name from the Libyan head of state), mustrongers (vendors in the stations or on the trains, travelling on the roofs of the carriages, who get their name from Neil Armstrong, both travelling up high), cambistes (money changers), dare-dare or businesseurs (street hawkers), batumacer (from 'ba-too much-eur', local craft hawkers cheating tourists) and more. As one sees, many of these professions carry names drawn from Africa's lexicon of modernity. Indeed, the new Congo heroes are 'modern', as De Boeck noted of the Bana Lunda or Kinshasa's youth gangs, who 'invent [...] an Africanized Occident of the little man', as exemplified by the success of Ninja or Rambo imagery (De Boeck 2003: 202–05).

1 The survey was carried out by the Observatoire du changement urbain, a research centre that is the source of all the information published here. It is placed under the aegis of the University of Lubumbashi and the Coopération universitaire au développement (CUD), a commission of the Conseil interuniversitaire francophone de Belgique (CIUF).

2 For Katanga, there is a very good survey of the organization of car theft, poaching and contraband in Rukangira wa Nkera and Schoepf (1991).
There is much to be said about these informal professions, using the expression for want of a better one, for the activities in question are institutionalized. The little shoe-shiner on the corner is under the orders of a 'sector chief' recognized by his peers, as is also the case for small jobs and trades like porters or packers. Cambistes work in groups, are always up to date on the rate and are quite capable of gathering together large sums of money which exceed their personal capital. Even the shege, the street children, are organized into small groups governed by the practice of redistribution of the gains and a division of the tasks relating to survival. In fact, these emerging occupations cannot properly be described as 'informal', nor can they be reduced to mere 'economy' since they rather substantiate the embeddedness of the economy within the society (Latouche 1998; De Herdt and Marysse 1999).

The progressive passage towards the 'fend-for-yourself' economy has been more difficult in Lubumbashi than in the rest of the country. Those coming from other provinces are sometimes astonished by the complaints of Lushois faced with crisis: they have already finished grieving for the old economic order. The town's industrial past and the prestige of the paid employees explain why it moved later and more reluctantly into informality. Lubumbashi had already experienced the development of petty trade and craft occupations during the crises of the 1930s and the late 1960s (Dibwe 2002), but this was on a minor scale and for short periods. By comparison, Kinshasa has experienced the informal sector for a longer time: it has been firmly rooted in the economic landscape since the 1950s (Houyoux 1973). This delay in Lubumbashi by comparison to Kinshasa manifests itself in the tendency of the mining town to borrow practices and words originally developed in the capital.

THE LEXICON OF THE SECOND ECONOMY

Few works have systematically investigated the socio-economic dimensions of vocabulary born in the urban African world. Epstein's pioneering research - he published an article in 1959 entitled 'Linguistic innovation and culture on the Copperbelt' [1992] - unfortunately did not create a basis for emulation in this field. A recent exception is Blundo and Olivier de Sardan's article about the popular semiology of corruption in west Africa (2001b). Closer to our field of enquiry, the collective work edited by Trefon (2004a) has made extensive use of the city's vocabulary to grasp the emerging patterns of sociability in Kinshasa.

The lexicon is more than a simple reflection of the social reality. Over and above the descriptive dimension, language has a performative function which makes it play an active role in interaction (Austin

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3 One finds many edifying lexical indications dealing with the crisis in towns, in works like that of Dorier-Apprill et al. (1998: 61-2, 257), but the references are usually illustrative.
1962; Parkin 1984). When a Congolese says with humour: ‘Article 15: débrouillez-vous!’ (Article 15: Fend for yourself!), he is performatively legitimizing his current behaviour as much as describing a pre-existent reality. Under the former regime, when someone used the term ‘ka-marécha’ (little marshal) to designate a measure of local alcohol, he was performatively framing a burlesque, obscene intimacy (Mbembe 1992) with Marshal Mobutu, which meant prison for some offenders. Language does not merely map society; it also partakes in its process. New expressions relating to food have certainly been a major field for political discourse in Lubumbashi over the last fifteen years (Petit et al. 2004: 23–24).

Many languages are spoken in Lubumbashi, and the majority of the population can express themselves in at least three languages: Swahili, French and their own mother tongue (which depends upon their family’s origin). French remains the expression of modern urbanity; Swahili is in daily use, but speakers often switch to French or other languages in the same sentence; finally, other languages – locally referred to as ‘dialects’ – are spoken within the family or to signify a closer ethnicity. Lingala is rarely used, except among soldiers: it is despised as the language of the capital, of the Mobutu regime and of its military. We shall henceforth render the Swahili and other African language morphemes in italics, and likewise the French, leaving the English in roman font.

During the survey mentioned above (Petit 2003), we asked eighteen investigators to remain on the lookout for new expressions that they might hear concerning informal economic practices. Two linguists from UNILU completed the team on the basis of their own knowledge of the subject (Mulumbwa and Kalonji 2003). The expressions are, for the most part, recent. They may be neologisms, borrowings, new meanings given to old expressions, expressions combining different languages (up to three), or slang expressions originating from sex workers, soldiers, students, street children or gangsters. In each case, they are marked language expressions, which draw the attention of the interlocutor and carry humorous complicity while using trendy language – typical of the youth, who are the first to peddle these lexical innovations. The connivance created by the use of these expressions acts on a performative level, for such linguistic ‘winks’ set the discussion at the level of the ‘real economy’ (the informal one), and suppose that both interlocutors acknowledge this as the frame of reference for their present interaction.

For the purposes of this article, we have grouped the entries into five sub-categories articulating each one around a central theme: energy, cunning, corruption, fraud, and poverty and wealth. The choices of these themes are, for the first four, what they represent in terms of adaptations in the face of the degradation of the economic environment; for the fifth, their evaluation of the economic status of the people facing this crisis. Obviously, not all the expressions mentioned here could be understood by all Lushois since the economic practices and vocabulary vary according to the social milieu. Let us point out finally that the crisis has also given birth to a slang
linked to criminality and delinquency, which we shall not address here.  

Courage and energy in everyday life

Most heads of family today struggle constantly against adversity, as opposed to the calm life of the employee of the past. ‘Choquer’ or ‘ku-choquer’, from the French ‘choc’ (shock or hit), is a new verb used since the beginning of the 1990s in Lubumbashi to describe a person determined to go out every morning and search for an activity which will allow him to earn enough to feed his family upon returning home in the evening … if he is lucky. This expression is unknown in Kinshasa and Brazzaville, where one speaks of ‘kobeta libanga’ (Lingala for ‘breaking stones’) when describing the many survival activities, in reference to the old forced labour system for building the roads. ‘Today kobeta libanga means being fearless, daring to take any risk, doing the physically impossible and the morally unimaginable’ (Nzeza 2004: 20; see also Dorier-Apprill et al. 1998: 257).

The expression ‘choquer’ has seemingly been coined by informal diamond-diggers in Congo and Angola. De Boeck reports that when the UNITA troops controlled the region of Cafungo (Angola), the Zaïrian diggers who worked outside their direct control were called ‘choqueurs’. ‘Working choc’ was extremely dangerous since these clandestine diggers were usually executed on sight (De Boeck 2003: 183–84). The term is also used in Eastern Kasai, in the small diamond exploitations close to Mbuji-Mayi. Here, ‘choqueurs’ designates the workers who are hired on a single-day basis to fill bags with diamantine gravel after a quarry has been dug. The term ‘choqueur’ (or ‘puma’) refers to the physical strength and rapidity needed for this work (Tshiunza Kalala 2002-03: 122).

In Lubumbashi, the notion of ‘choc’ is to be found in synonymous expressions about the mobilization of energy in making ends meet: ‘kupika sando’ (hitting with a hammer), ‘kupikanisha’ or ‘kukombanisha’ (to fight), ‘kujipikapika’ (to exert oneself), ‘kuboce’ (from the French slang ‘bosser’, which means to work hard).

The man who ‘choque’ (shocks) is ‘kasakasa’ (Lingala for busy, restless, enterprising), ‘dare’ (in a hurry, from the French ‘daredare’, double quick), yuluyulu (standing up, since he has no time to sit down). He does not know what work opportunities will come about during the day. He can improvise, one way or another, and obtain a ‘contrat’ (contract), that is, work for a day. The situation is short-term: a day started is not won in advance. The evening meal – often the only one of the day (Petit 2004) – takes place late, so late that it is called ‘karibu na kesho’ (close to tomorrow). In fact, parents often put off going home

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4 A veritable slang developed in the milieu of the wayambar, a name designating the young men living by makeshift or petty or more serious forms of crime. The words that they use between them, a mixture of borrowings from other languages, inversion of syllables, abbreviations and so on, allow them to communicate without giving away their plans to the uninitiated.
because they haven’t yet managed to earn enough to buy the necessaries for a meagre meal at the night markets. For many, this short-term view is the only possible horizon; the local notion of ‘contrat’ is a single day’s work. The use of the word ‘capital’ has undergone a similar adaptation too; it now sometimes designates an amount of money, as little as one US dollar, which would enable someone to buy a quantity of vegetables at a market, for example, and resell them at a micro-profit.

To sum up, reaction to the crisis calls for ‘kinetic’ answers: clash, movement, restlessness. This is not only a way of speaking, but a tangible reality of today’s town morphology. For some years now, the centre of Lubumbashi has remained very busy much later in the evening than before, a result of the way people are engaged in their ‘contracts’ or looking for some business. Nzeza makes the same remark about the streets of Kinshasa, which are crowded from dawn to late evening by anguished (‘sthenic’) people going to destinations where they hope they can earn their living (2004: 37).

Cunning and vigilance
‘Souple ni we moya’ or ‘Souple ni we one’: the ‘souple’ (a supple or flexible person) is you alone; or to be more exact: each one, each self, should be supple. To be supple is to be alert, on one’s guard, vigilant and able to get by. It is not being taken advantage of. It is also not being caught by a superior for a fault or offence. That would be the warning given when a set-up job (by a few people), a theft for instance, was about to be spotted: general demobilization and everyone for himself, being ‘souple’ in avoiding traps and pitfalls. It would also be used to mock a clumsy person who got caught out over some transaction, or who came off second best in his explanations with his boss.

‘Kutwanga kisu’ (to stab). This means ‘to lie’. The image is borrowed from that of a person who has been stabbed and then robbed by a bandit. Likewise, the crook manages to divest someone of his money or goods through honeyed words which turn out to be plain trickery. Again the word is used as a warning: one would drop ‘kisu!’ (knife!) into the ear of someone who is about to be tricked.

‘Kuona clair’ (to see clearly). While the metaphor of clarity is used in other contexts to illustrate a person’s good moral disposition or ritual purity, it tends to refer to trickery and craftiness now. Someone who sees clearly is – as we have seen for the first two expressions – someone who doesn’t let himself be taken advantage of; but it also denotes someone who is able to get rid of any moral encumbrance while taking advantage of the situation at hand. It is the civil servant who is not too fastidious about being corrupt. It is the driver who ‘comprend’ (understands) by slipping a note or two to the road police rather than engaging in an interminable discussion.

‘Mirage’. Here we keep within the visual metaphors. The standard measures (kilos and so on) have long disappeared from the Lushois

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5 The expression seems to be used nationally (Van Acker and Vlassenroot 2000).
marketplace, except in some 'de luxe' shops. There are new empiric measures for flour and other products, like the small plastic bucket, kambeketi (from the English 'bucket'), proof of the shortening of economic cycles just referred to above, since these new measures are designed for a single meal (Mulumbwa et al. 2004). The mirage is a kambeketi that has been shrunk by being put in boiling water and then slightly flattened; the seller thus cheats the client on the quantity sold. On the other hand, if you are buying, it is advantageous to have a kambeketi that has been enlarged for maximizing the amount received. That is a kimbanseke, the name of a district in Kinshasa known for its cemetery: as the cemetery engulfs great numbers of people, so the kimbanseke engulfs whatever it is meant to measure.

'Marimi' (Kisanga for 'the fields'), 'villageois', 'musenji', 'kisamamba': the country person. The rural populations are intensely scorned by city dwellers, who regard them as real 'country bumpkins' and use all the above expressions (of ancient origin) to express their sentiments. By extension, they also designate someone who is naive and easily fooled, cheated and robbed, such as a villager coming to the city and being unaware of urban pragmatism, unable to cheat to get rich or to bribe to get faster service. That sort of idiot is a 'bulaale' (from kulaala, to sleep), a 'bulangeci' (someone under the bedcovers, from the English 'blanket'), that is, a sleeper or a dreamer who is easily abused.

Corruption
An entire range of terms surrounds corruption in Lubumbashi, as has been noted in west African contexts (Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001b). While the two lexical registers described above mostly concern popular milieux, the extensive corruption vocabulary is linked to a certain socio-economic elite and tends above all towards French. Nonetheless, one finds Swahili terms here too, like 'kukata milomo' (to cut the lips): it is well known that a corrupt employee will not talk. One can 'traiter' (deal with) an official to get his assistance, and to do that one has to 'kumwangaliliya' (to look out for him), that is, to give a gift or money. This way one can obtain a delay, a report, a reduction, good marks for a course, a document or other services. The employee, from his side, must play it carefully: he has to appear a bit offended, but still ready to 'comprendre' (understand) whoever seeks his help; at the end of the transaction he sermonizes the person who approached him so that it does not happen again, and to make him realize to what point the employee has put himself in danger to help him. The latter thanks the former warmly and respectfully for all the trouble he has gone to. Hence, corruption is redefined in terms of a 'problème' (problem) to which each party has given a human solution. The expression 'il faut comprendre' (please understand), addressed to a public official, is revealing: it calls for impunity for minor illegal acts (e.g. stealing electricity, eluding taxes and so on) under the cover of an ethic of empathy in the present times of distress. Since the crisis has touched everyone so harshly, especially common people, who could deny them the right to make ends meet in a slightly illicit way?
Sometimes, the initiative for corruption comes directly from the employee, official and so on, who speaks of the 'frais administratifs' (administrative expenses) concerning such-and-such an operation, or who asks amiably 'ya sucre', 'ya cayi', 'ya transport' (for lemonade, for tea, or for transport). It is simply a case of requiring payment for a service related to his function.

Noticeable also in the forces of law and order is racketeering. The traffic police often stop vehicles to verify whether drivers have the legal documents and pretend to take them down to the station if the papers are not in order. If by chance a driver has everything in order, after some discussion, the policeman asks 'Mitakula mapapiers?' (Can I eat papers?), meaning that he is not concerned about the documents but about what he might 'eat'. The image of eating is used often in Lubumbashi to designate the embezzling of funds, as everywhere in Congo and in many African countries (Bayart 1989: 10–12; Blundo and Olivier de Sardan 2001b: 107). 'Il a tout bouffe' (he has eaten it all) is the common saying about someone who has recklessly emptied the till.

One can imagine that some institutions make good profits from these practices, as is reported to be the case for the customs and excise, tax or immigration offices, or in fact any state service operating with large sums of incoming money. The people in charge of such services can diminish the amounts declared formally and so reduce the taxes to be paid in exchange for bribes. For any imports, one has to pay 'per diem', that is, an illegal but now customary tax, to the agents in charge of checking incoming goods (Kamwanya Kalemuna 2004). Clerical staff in Congo are poorly paid, and administrative officials consequently attempt to extort as much as they can from the public treasury: they often inflate the list of employees with fictive ones (e.g. long-deceased individuals who have not been officially declared dead) to obtain higher salaries. Inspectors are sent to check the situation, and are systematically bribed not to denounce the real situation.

All transfers of funds potentially lend themselves to a particular form of corruption called 'commission', a term used nationally. This takes place when the official or employee, who is in a decision-making position, agrees to send regular funds (e.g. for a province's budget) but under express conditions: that a certain percentage – usually 10 per cent – of the amount in question will come back to him shortly afterwards. If the authority in question does not see the return, the beneficiaries will not be able to count on him again, whatever their real rights. Sometimes also, when a large part or the totality of the funds goes back to the authorities, the 'commission' is called 'opération retour' (kickback).

A person who does not take advantage of his position to turn things to his benefit is regarded as having no intelligence (akili); but anyone who takes too much is stupid because 'ekonaharibisha kazi' (he spoils his job), that is, it will not be long before he is fired. Predation finds the right tune in moderation, as the proverb says: 'kula ndambo, kwaca ndambo' (eat some, leave some). By doing so, one is assured a long-term
income. Moderation is a very relative concept, since 'good' examples would seem to be highly corrupt persons when evaluated against other standards.

Much can be said of corruption as it is written into the entire social network, which it also generates. No one gets into largescale corruption unless they have a superior or an influential person to 'chapeauter' (cover) them. Benefits have to be shared with the authorities and with the staff: for example, a traffic policeman gets some daily (illegal) taxes from the bus drivers working on 'his' section, but he has to hand over some to his chief. Otherwise, he would be removed from this lucrative service and would have to stay at the police station, which generates less income. As is apparent in this example, each act of corruption creates a new link: through it, both parties are jointly responsible for a transgression that afterwards will unite them under the law of silence and the gauge of future solidarity. One can better understand the impunity that reigns in Congolese public bodies where it is practically impossible to fire an employee since everyone knows about everyone else's illegal actions. As for the incorruptible state officials, their refusal to participate opens them up to much hostility: they are said to be 'durs' (hard), they do not want to 'comprendre' (understand) others, they do not want things to 's'arranger' (work out); and they find the path to progress within their institution barred if they are not simply fired.6

Fraud

In Kinshasa, the term 'coop' (seemingly from the French 'coopération') lends its meaning to a lucrative operation set up by a few people in the informal economy, usually with criminal connotations (Nzeza 2004: 34–35). In Lubumbashi, the expression is applied mainly to the embezzling of funds or goods as a well-planned enterprise undertaken by a small group. In a shop, for example, one could see this as an understanding between the stock manager, the cashier and a client, who work out a way of bringing out goods at a price greater than they actually paid for them.

'Ku-fipa' or 'ku-fipe' from the French 'profiter' (to benefit from) gives a particular meaning to 'coop' which consists of an arrangement between a person commissioned to buy for someone else and a cashier: they inflate the invoices and share the difference. There are other terms to describe swindling: 'ku-damer' (to crown a piece at draughts), 'ku-zuta' (to win at marbles), 'ku-profiter', 'ku-tratter', 'kopakopa' (from coop), 'traitement' and so on. As to misappropriated goods – or any goods of suspect origins – they are called 'biloko', from the Lingala meaning 'goods'. Small goods

6 The social pressures against those who resist corruption, the impunity of those who take part in it and the inflating spiral that results are sensibly analysed by Olivier de Sardan (1996) and by Blundo and Olivier de Sardan (2001a, b).
taken from the workplace to be used at home are called ‘ka-kwisaidiya nako’ (to help yourself with), hence they have not been stolen.

Chance, the poor and the wealthy
One doesn’t always succeed. The ‘horoscope’ or the ‘libaku’ (Lingala: luck, especially in money matters) is not always favourable, and one finds oneself destitute, a ‘criseur’, ‘anakwasa cini’ (one is down), ‘anakuwa kwana’ (one is dying), ‘anameza mpepo’ (one is swallowing air [without food]). Daily life is precarious, one gets to a ‘situation critique’ (critical situation) and the moment arrives when one only holds on ‘kwa neema (ya Mungu)’ (by the grace of God)). Such a person is in a situation of social death. The small vegetable markets (cheap food, culturally discredited) are sometimes called ‘réa’, short for reanimation. People reduced to eating only vegetables are symbolically, socially dying.

In this precarious context, it is important to enhance one’s chance of receiving new forms of benediction. Lubumbashi, like Kinshasa, is congested with new Evangelical churches holding prosperity as a major concern. During the service, a pastor may call the faithful in succession who can give US$100, then US$20, then US$5 and so on down to smaller amounts calculated in Congolese francs, and pray God to bless them (in this descending order). One can also obtain good luck by naming one’s shop with Christian references, such as ‘Dieu m’a donne’ or ‘Grâce à Dieu’ (God has given me; Hail the Lord!); or tagging one’s minibus with ‘Soyez sûr de ce voyage car Jésus est avec nous’ (Be confident of your journey for Jesus is with us); or giving new Christian names to one’s children, like Chrinovict (short for ‘Christ notre victoire’, ‘Christ, our victory’) or Gradi (short for ‘Grâce à Dieu’, ‘Hail the Lord!’).

At any rate, a bad situation may always turn around: someone ‘anafufuka’ (has been resuscitated), and can even become someone ‘wa yulu’ (from above), that is, someone rich, a ‘ngwefu’, a ‘nv(w)ama’ (from Kikongo: rich), a ‘patron’, a ‘grand’, a ‘boss’. But wealth has to be shared to be acceptable, and the first requisite is to ‘look out for one’s family’ (kwangaliya famile yake). To show one’s success, one must spend lavishly, especially (but not only) in popular or rural milieux where such behaviour upgrades one to the status of ‘patron’ (see also De Boeck 2003: 192–94). In Lubumbashi, lavish behaviour is referred to as ‘leaving the flour, [or] the powder, [or] the iron roofs’ (kwaca bunga, kwaca poudre, kwaca malata), that is, dazzling people as these white or shiny things can do; or, as ‘beating one’s chest’ (kujipika mu kilari), in the sense of daring where ordinary people would not. The ostentation of the economic elite, who spread the signs of their wealth (4WD vehicles, mobile phones, two televisions in the living-room and so on) for all to see, merits a passage from Bourdieu and his reflections upon ‘distinction’ at the core of the hierarchic structure of society (Friedman 1994; Rowlands 1996).
CONCLUSION: THE MORAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE STATE AND THE ECONOMY

A noticeable feature of this lexicon is its complete lack of reference to the war that was raging during the research in 2000. Only one expression related to the conflict has appeared since that time: ‘mutiles de guerre’ (disabled soldiers), referring to tattered banknotes still in circulation. This calls for some comment – for other major political events, like the National Conference (1990–97) or the Liberation War (1996–97), have produced their batch of neologisms in Lubumbashi, especially in the food economy (Petit et al. 2004). But contrary to Kinshasa, Bukavu or Kisangani, Lubumbashi was spared direct armed confrontation: the southernmost foray of the rebels led them to Pweto, about 200 km from the town. And there was no dramatic change in the trade networks (linking Lubumbashi to Southern Africa via Zambia), nor in the main economic activities, a situation completely different from what was going on in or close to the ‘rebel’ zones. Seen from Lubumbashi, the ‘crisis’ seems independent from the war situation. The latter appears as an extension of the former and is sometimes rumoured to be an easy rationalization of the shortages, delays in paying wages and so on, that were already common before the conflict. This shallow influence of the war on the discourse about economy is completely at odds with what has been observed in other regions, like the Kivu provinces, where a real ‘war economy’ has developed (Jackson 2002, 2003).

Our research has brought to the fore certain social patterns typical of the present-day Lushois and presumably of many other African urbanites. In the 1950s, Epstein’s pioneering research on the lexicon of the Copperbelt mining compounds came to the conclusion that language innovations revolved largely around the theme of prestige (1992). Although prestige does still constitute a topos for linguistic creativity in Lubumbashi as we have argued, it is rather the strain of survival or economic satisfaction that constitutes the crux of lexical innovation in the present day. Wealth and poverty are described in terms of life and death. The expressions relative to self-help activities contain numerous kinetic references: to hit, to hammer, suppleness; or visual: to see clearly, or mirage, which bear witness to the fact that the disposition towards these activities has become like a new sense necessary for survival. Lexically, the crisis is fully embodied. As to corruption and fraud, the analysis reveals that they are redefined in terms of eating (another corporeal reference) or of compassion, solidarity, or like a win at marbles which one would be stupid to deprive oneself of.

This quest for life does not go on automatically; only he who undertakes it with all the energy, all the cunning and all the skill he has, escapes the social and economic death of a ‘criseur’. The semantic transformation of the word ‘maisha’ is illuminating. This Swahili word

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7 This war and its associated incursions have of course reinforced the feeling that Congo is plundered by foreigners. Conspiracy theories are very common in this context.
originally meant the life of a person, his biography; but it has, within the last few years, become synonymous with the crisis and precariousness, a connotation unknown a while back. It just has to be pronounced and the other person will automatically finish the sentence ‘maisha inakuwa nguwu’, life has become expensive!8

Against this background of struggling for survival, the theme of the little man who manages to beat the system stands out, like the clever hero in African tales. Witness the sympathy the Congolese hold for the international political figures who dare to hold out against American political hegemony, whether it be Khadafi (whose name has been lent to small fuel traffickers), the ayatollahs (as the protesting students were called around 1980), Saddam Hussein (the nickname of one of Mobutu’s sons), even Osama bin Laden. These leaders are popular, even if the elite Congolese do not relay this politically incorrect message on the international scene. The 11 September 2001 attacks were greeted with sympathy by many Congolese who saw a certain balancing out of the misfortunes of the world which usually only hit Africa: ‘like that the Americans can see what we have to face daily’. Osama bin Laden is seen as being brave, as a David fighting against Goliath.9

This theme endows popular economic representations. The great against whom one plays here are the state and the wealthy. To begin with the former, depriving the state does not create any remorse. ‘L’État haletake’ (the state is not used to giving), one would say to justify any fraud. Or one would legitimize a theft by saying: ‘ni bya l’État’ (it belongs to the state!), stating thereby that no one was wronged by stealing public property. In these expressions, the state appears as estranged from its citizens with whom it does not share, and so one can profit from it without compunction.

These denunciations against the state must be understood in their proper context: as performative statements legitimizing one’s behaviour, not as political critiques issued by a ‘civil society’ resisting the regime’s domination. The state in question here is an abstract reality, not the present authorities themselves: since power is currently shared between the different regional groups, almost everyone has connections – not equally, of course, and each at his own level – with some political authorities. As noted by Mbembe, ‘postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or collaboration but can best be characterized as illicit cohabitation, a relationship made fraught by the very fact of the commandement and its “subjects” having to share the same living space’ (1992: 4). A good indication of this familiarity is the way people refer to political watchwords to show off how embezzlement

8 A semantic slide similar to this has been noted in Brazzaville, where the term ‘la vie’ (life) has lost its biological connotation and more readily evokes ‘the dramatic proliferation of the urban world, its instabilities, its divisions, its realities and competitions, and the unbridled bursts of its pleasures’ (Banzouzi 1997–8: 230).

9 To take another example, the students of the University of Lubumbashi who demonstrated against the registration fee in December 2001 tagged ‘al-Qaeda’ on the walls, while the police sent to restore order sang that they were going to Kabul (to get rid of the Osamas).
and the informal economy is the common lot of everyone in Congo. Mobutu’s famous quotation ‘Moto na moto abongisa’ (Let each person sort things [out at his own level]) was ironically reinterpreted, following the old marshal's kleptocratic behaviour, as an invitation for each and everyone to steal at his own level of responsibility. Along the same lines, there is a reference to the mythic ‘Article 15: débrouillez-vous’ (Article 15: Fend for yourself!), which rumour in Katanga attributes to the former constitution of secessionist Eastern Kasai.

The fend-for-yourself ethos is shared by the population in general, who feel no compunction about stealing from a state that itself steals, but also by the Congolese elite, who embezzle state resources for their own benefit. To become legitimate, however, embezzlement has to be ‘moralized’ by redistribution to one’s own, depending on the level. Wealthy people holding fraudulent positions, like many magistrates, toll agents, customs officers, politicians and so on, are very popular in their own milieu if they show generosity to a football team, an ethnic association, a church or the like. Their fellows will turn a blind eye to the origin of this wealth, since it is used for the well-being of the community. What is despised is selfish accumulation and eluding the obligations of ‘solidarité africaine’ (African solidarity), a catch-all expression usually used by people who feel they are being intensively asked for help by their kin and relations, but who feel unable to contest these demands. A stingy person is called an ‘étau’ (vice) or a ‘main dure’ (tough hand), for he tries to hold on tightly to his money.^^

Deceiving the wealthy – especially the anonymous, non-redistributing rich individuals, such as expatriates – is not considered immoral in most contexts, since their accumulation has not been socially legitimized through redistribution. It is considered that stealing from companies or the wealthy is not going to really make anyone suffer anyway. In contrast, it is immoral to steal from a ‘maskini wa Mungu’ (one of God’s poor), that is, a child, an old person, a handicapped person or a ‘criseur’. In the common representation, such an act constitutes a crime, because it endangers the survival of an eminently vulnerable person; the wrongdoer may even be charged with witchcraft. Conversely, shopkeepers offer goods to the poor on Saturdays as a moral duty.

To summarize, an asymmetric ethic guides fend-for-yourself behaviours: trickery is legitimate in the face of the state, the wealthy and legal entities – which are commonly accused of not sharing – while the afflicted are the object of pity (buruma). This logic may be observed in the establishing of market prices. The economic status of the buyer is an important element in fixing the price: it would be seen as immoral for an affluent person to refrain from showing generosity towards ‘poor’ vendors. The first of these authors, a European, found himself one day

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^10 It would be interesting to investigate further what could be labelled ‘moral accumulation’. White’s analysis of rumours about singers in Kinshasa (2004) shows that the ability to share, to keep contact with their ‘base’, and to appear as ‘un homme du peuple’, contributes to positive appreciation, while selfishness and conceit have the opposite effect. These remarks certainly also qualify the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ rich in Congo.
faced by a seller who did not want to sell fish at the price that the former had proposed – the market price – because she was scandalized that a rich person should not show pity for a poor trader like herself. The vendor will also try to arouse pity while trying to sell to other Africans by evoking the number of children she has to feed, so that they buy from her even if goods are cheaper elsewhere. Latouche has already shown in other contexts to what point the establishing of market prices attests to the un-depersonalization of economic exchange revolving around a meeting (1998: 75–77).

Despite all the practices of cunning and criminality we have described, survival in Lubumbashi cannot be equated with a Hobbesian struggle of each against everyone. Just as the historian E. P. Thompson (1971) showed that the food riots in modern Europe were more an affirmation of a ‘moral economy’ – that of fair pricing of food in a paternalistic model – than a Pavlovian reaction due to empty stomachs (Randall and Charlesworth 1999), the present attitude of the Lushois to ways of living cannot be reduced to simple pragmatism but finds enlightenment in the representation of the economy, wealth and the state. Austen has said that African societies represent the world as a ‘zero sum universe … a world where all profit is gained at someone else’s loss’ (Austen 1993: 92–93). This position is somewhat overstated since ideas about growth and renewal are certainly not unknown in Africa, but it points to the extreme suspicion surrounding accumulation in societies with strong levelling tendencies, something Geschiere has convincingly demonstrated in his analysis of witchcraft in Cameroon (1995). This is consistent with our data: trickery allows the little man – or, more broadly speaking, ordinary people – to rebalance the situation more favourably for themselves: they are simply retrieving what they have lost with the crisis, whose origins are attributed to the state and the economic elite, both accused of immoral accumulation. This may partly explain why the pillaging of October 1991, initiated by the army, was enthusiastically followed by the ‘poor’: it appeared to initiate the redistribution of goods unjustly gained and unshared by the ‘rich’, with expatriates being the first in line for being looted. Witnesses reveal that this was, for many Lushois, a euphoric moment leading up to a general redistribution of wealth.11 A very eloquent image of this moral dimension of the pillaging was reported by someone who saw a looter uncorking bottles of champagne one after another in a de luxe supermarket, and polishing them off, shouting: ‘I am free!’ Plundering the unfair hoard was a step towards freedom.

As for the elites, they do not feel responsible for the crisis or for the economic disparities: they assign them to the state (or to foreigners), and diverting public resources seems legitimate if they share them out

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11 A similar atmosphere of frenzy, euphoria and revenge has been reported about the September 1991 lootings in Kinshasa (Devisch 1995: 606–7). More than just pillaging commodities, people were destroying symbols of the regime and of the wealthy, especially those belonging to expatriates (the Belgian School and so on).
‘top-down’. Fundamentally, the state is drained as much from the top as from the bottom as a result of the ‘politics of the belly’ (Bayart 1989).

As Janet MacGaffey has shown, it is unlikely that the second economy, whatever ‘popular’ profile it presents, effectively contributes to the reduction of the economic inequalities between Congolese; it seems, on the contrary, to increase them (1991: 158). Without a doubt, we are at the beginning of a long process of a social recasting, the effects of which will only be known to us in the coming decades.

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ABSTRACT

The second, or informal, economy developed later in Lubumbashi (DRC) than it had in Kinshasa. The Katanga metropolis, long protected from the process of informalization thanks to its large industrial complexes, suffered seriously from the crisis of the 1990s which led to the collapse of the mining industry and, more generally, of the whole salaried sector. After a brief history of the city and of the state of play of the informal economy, this article attempts a detailed analysis of this economy's lexicon. Expressions newly created from Swahili, French and other languages provide an excellent point of entry into the concrete practices of this sector, as well as the representations and morality on which such practices are based. Strongly associated with expressions of energy, cunning and conspiracy, the vocabulary emerging from the second economy bears witness to the appreciation of the 'anti-hero' and demonstrates
the inception of a new moral economy in which the state and the powerful have become targets of legitimate predation based on the principle of redistribution.

RÉSUMÉ

L'économie seconde ou informelle s'est développée avec quelque retard à Lubumbashi (RDC), si l'on compare cette situation à celle de Kinshasa. Longtemps protégée de ce processus grâce à la présence de grands complexes industriels, la métropole katangaise a subi de plein fouet les effets de la crise des années 1990, qui virent l'effondrement de l'industrie minière et plus généralement de tout le secteur salarié. Après un bref historique de la ville et un état des lieux de l'économie informelle, cet article entame l'analyse détaillée du lexique lié à cette dernière. Les expressions nouvellement créées au départ du swahili, du français et d'autres langues offrent un excellent mode d'accès aux pratiques concrètes de ce secteur, ainsi qu'aux représentations et à la morale qui les fondent. Fortement associé aux registres de l'énergie, de la ruse et de la complicité, le vocabulaire émergent de l'économie seconde témoigne de la valorisation du 'héros malin' et révèle l'apparition d'une nouvelle économie morale, dans laquelle l'État et les puissants sont devenus les cibles d'une prédation légitimée par le principe de redistribution.