SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF URBAN ETHNIC SOCIO-CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS IN KATANGA PROVINCE, THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL LINK BETWEEN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE CONGOLESE STATE

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This doctoral thesis explores the socio-political role of urban ethnic and regional socio-cultural associations in Katanga, a former province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Utilising an in-depth qualitative case study approach, it investigates how these associations defend the interests of ethnic and regional communities they represent, and the way they interact with the Congolese state and its institutions. By studying specific historical, cultural, socio-economic and political contexts in which these associations have been founded, have developed and currently act, this thesis provides an empirical contribution to the better understanding of socio-political dynamics of urban ethnic organisations, and of mechanisms of participation and representation in the Congolese society since the restart of the democratisation process.

The first empirical study unravels the complex world of ethnic and regional socio-cultural organisations in the cities of former Katanga province. which constitute a multi-tier system reflecting ethnic, provincial and national identities. This study demonstrates that, on the one hand, ethnic socio-cultural associations can behave like interest groups that try to influence the distribution of spoils in favour of their communities, employing autochthony discourses. They adapt to changing political and socio-economic realities by emphasising alternative autochthony/allochthony dichotomies in redefining the boundaries of their 'own soil'. In doing so, they stir up inter-group tensions in the context of political and/or economic disputes. On the other hand, the study shows that these associations can also play a role in mitigating conflict: the multi-tier system provides forums where representatives of different communities can meet, negotiate and potentially resolve inter-community disagreements.

The second study further explores ideas developed in the first study, focusing on the break-up (the *découpage*) of Katanga province into four new provinces as part of Congo's constitutional decentralisation, and the impact that this process has engendered on relationships between different communities that had considered themselves autochthonous to (now former) Katanga

province. It investigates how ethnic associations have tried to influence governmental decision making in the decentralisation process. The prospect of the creation of new provinces with unequal levels of mineral wealth and industrialisation, and uncertainty about the socio-economic and political position of communities (and their elites) in the new entities has divided ethnic associations over the *découpage*, fueling tensions between Katangan communities. It also induced the construction of new identities: new provincial boundaries turned former autochthons of Katanga into allochthons in those cases where their ethnic affiliations ancestrally connect them to a new province other than the one where they reside. Some ethnic associations employed autochthony discourses to reinforce their arguments and claims, attempting to change economic and political power distributions in favour of their communities.

The third study investigates the role of ethnic associations in Congolese presidential and legislative elections during Joseph Kabila's presidency. It reveals that they have mobilised voters along ethnic and regional lines. The then ruling party has instrumentalised Katangan ethnic associations to support the presidential candidacy of Joseph Kabila, who was considered a Katangan, using the presence of party members on the associations' executive boards to mobilise their communities by appealing to a common Katangan identity. The study also demonstrates that ethnic associations have tried to influence the outcome of legislative elections to enhance the collective representation of their ethnic groups in state organs in a bid to secure access to state resources. The underlying assumption is that in a state unable to adequately provide public goods to citizens, and in the absence of political parties promoting solid social programs, people vote for candidates from their own ethic community, and that elected elites will serve the needs of their co-ethnics in return for their votes. This study confirms that democratisation processes seem to have reinforced the political role of ethnic associations in Katanga province, and that ethnicity is one of the factors influencing the outcome of elections through the mediation of ethnic associations.

The fourth study analyses the functioning of ethnic associations, and their mutual relationships and interactions, from a social capital perspective. It demonstrates that ethnic associations in Katanga have accumulated different types of social capital, and that their social capital continuously shifts between bridging and bonding forms, depending on changing political and economic realities. This either strengthens social cohesion or triggers conflicts between communities. The multi-tier structure described in the first study, reflects this dynamic system of social capital shifting between its different forms. Alliances between associations are based on bridging ties, which increase interconnectivity between groups and generate broader solidarities and identities. However, associational alliances, forged to defend common economic and political interests, can reverse bridging social capital, transforming it into a new form of bonding social capital that is based on a reinforced solidarity within the enlarged group. This paper also points to the importance of combining bridging social capital with linking social capital (the latter connecting ethnic associations with authorities) in order to mitigate inter-group conflicts.