

THE IMPACT OF IMPERIALISM ON THE  
CONGOLESE POLITICAL CRISES, 1960-1997

BY

INFAMARA CAMBAI

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الجامعة الإسلامية العالمية ماليزيا  
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بِوَسِيْلَتِيْ اِسْلَامًا اَبْتَارًا اَبْجَسًا مِلْدَسِيَّا

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the independence father of modern Ghana and a pioneer of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) now African Union (A.U), made a historical statement in January 1961, during the Casablanca Conference in Morocco against colonialism and imperialism in Africa. In that statement, Dr. Nkrumah emphasised the following statements:

I have no doubt that the leaders who have met at this Conference are all great nationalists of no mean order, who have demonstrated unmistakably to the whole world in various ways their iron opposition to colonization and their granite resolve to liquidate these evils from the face of our beloved continent. For my part, I must say that as long as I live, and as long as any little vestige of colonialism remains in Africa, I shall prosecute a ruthless war on these monsters, a war in which there shall be no truce. Colonialism and imperialism have no honour, no shame, no morals, and no conscience.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the role of imperialism in aggravating the Congolese political crisis since the early 1960s and throughout Mobutu's dictatorial military regime in the country, including the Belgian colonialist's application of the policy of "divide and rule" during their colonial era in the Congo. The study argues that colonialism had been an underlying factor that triggered some amateur Congolese politicians to indulge the country in a destructive civil war that continued throughout Mobutu's dictatorial military rule and until its downfall on May 7, 1997.

The discussion explains the joint drive of the Western imperialist-capitalist forces and the Congolese neo-colonialists' incitement of the inexperienced Congolese army to rise against the legal and democratically elected Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba, and his legal government immediately after independence, and his assassination with two of his colleagues on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1961. The research highlights the far reaching consequences of this plot against Lumumba in the Congo, and in the newly-independent African states as well as in the international community at large.

The research explores the role of the imperialists to impose Mobutu on the Congolese body politics, and the subsequent resistance to his long military rule that was finally forcefully toppled by Laurent Kabila in May 7, 1997.

A space is allocated for a discussion of some economic and educational issues in the Congo during the period of study. In particular, the involvement of Mobutu and his ilk in extensive corrupt practices, the counter-productive economic measures adopted by the World Bank and the international Monetary Fund (IMF) in the Congo, and the poor educational standard of the Congolese political leaders that was partially responsible for the prolongation of the political crisis in the country. The study also shows that ethnocentrism had sharply divided these politicians along street narrow racial lines that hindered all attempts to solve political disputes amicably.

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## **APPROVAL PAGE**

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Political Sciences.

---

Zeenath Kausar  
Supervisor

Date:

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---

Md. Moniruzzaman  
Examiner

Date:

This dissertation was submitted to the Department of Political Sciences and is accepted as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Political Sciences.

---

Wahabuddin Ra'ees  
Head, Department of  
Political Sciences

Date:

This dissertation was submitted to the Kulliyah of IRKHS and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Political Sciences.

---

Hazizan B. Md Noon  
Dean, Kulliyah of Islamic  
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## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my beloved father, Aliou Ibrahim Cambai, who left me at the age three; and also to my dear mother Aminah Muhammad Fati who also passed away when I was doing my secondary school. She was the one who permitted and encouraged me to pursue my education. This work is also dedicated to my uncles, especially, Bourema Ibrahim Cambai, Fodde Ibrahim Cambai, Musa Ibrahim Cambai, Bakar Ibrahim Cambai and Yahya Fodeo Yafah. These are the people who brought me up. Others to whom this work is dedicated are the following: My aunties Jomkom Ibrahim Cambai, Sira Fati, Binta Yafah, Fenda Fati, Jarah Dahaba and their daughters; my beloved brothers and sisters, cousins and aunties, particularly my cousin Almami Comko Dahaba. Also to my two sons, Muhammad Famara Cambai, Aliou Famara Cambai and their beloved mother Salimatou Jallow whom I missed a lot. It was their patience, support and inspiration that enabled me to complete this work. I wish my father and my mother whom were my source of encouragement and inspiration, were alive to see my thesis accomplished. Lastly, to all the people who directly or indirectly contributed to my education especially, the late Saliou Janyi and his family, and Essa Ibrahim Fati.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MNC	Movement National Congolese Party
CPS	Comparative Political Studies
UN	United Nations
AD	Anne Domino
BC	Before Christ
USA	United States of America
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HIV	.Human Infection Virus
H.M	Houghton Mifflin
WWII	World War Two
GDP	Growth Domestic Product
FC	Franc Congolais
ABAKO	Association des Bakongo Party
ABAKO Bakongo	.Association pour la Sauvegarde de la Culture et des Intrers des Bakongo
CJCA	Congolese Journal Conscience African
USD	United States Dollar
UDPS	Unition Democracy Party System
HCRPT	.High Council of the Republic-Parliament of Transition
AFDL	Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire
ADAPES	Association des Anciens Eleves des Peres de Scheut
PNP	Progressive National Party
PC	<i>Force Publique</i>

EVOLUE	.Educated Elite or Citizens
PM	Prime Minister
DPM	Deputy Prime Minister
NSC	.National Secrete Council
IG	Inspector General
MPR	.Movement Populaires de la Révolution
IMF	.International Monetary Fund
WB	World Bank
OAU	Organizations of African Unity
AU	African Union
MPLA	Movement Popular Liberation of the Angola
AFD	Alliance des Forces Democratiques pour la Liberation du Congo-Zaire.

**1. CHAPTER ONE**  
**2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH AND**  
**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE COUNTRY, CONGO**  
**(ZAIRE)**

**INTRODUCTION**

This research is concerned primarily with the impact of colonialist and neo-colonialist in the Congolese political crises in the 1960, from the take over of Congolese politics by Joseph Désiré Mobutu in 1965 and throughout his military dictatorship until the downfall of his regime in 1997. The colonialist's "divide and rule policy" which was implemented by the Belgian colonial administration in the Congo during their arrival in the country, was mainly responsible for the political crises and instability, from the period of the nation's independence until now. This was also led the Congo and its people a horrendous civil war which resulted in the massacre of innocent people and the total destruction of the country's economy. As a result, Congo now has the world lowest economic growth and is ranked among the world poorest countries.

Although, the Congo (Zaire) has been a centre-stage for political and economic crises since its independence, this study focuses on the period between its early days of independence on 30, June 1960, and throughout Mobutu's despotic military regime and its downfall in 1997. Throughout this period civil wars instigated by political elites has torn the country apart, Political opposition and rebellion against Mobutu's authoritarian military regime never subsided during this period. However, some relative stability was achieved during the first quarter of his 32 years long rule in the Congo (1965-1997)

Nevertheless, a number of factors could explain this state of affairs, one of which was the Belgian imperialist creation of the ethnic problems in the Congo by



using the “divide and rule policy” which lead to power struggle among the Congolese political elites. The other factor was low educational attainment among the Congolese politicians during the early period of independence. Other contributory factors were the imperialist underdevelopment of the Congolese economy, religious conflicts, the imposition of foreign ideological beliefs among the Congolese politicians, the Congolese army mutiny after independence, the negative response of Belgian paratroops to the army mutiny, the overthrow of Lumumba’s legitimate government and his eventual murder by his political rivals

Additional factors, like Mobutu’s authoritarian military regime’s intervention in Congolese politics, his dependency on the Western countries, the control of neo-colonial powers of the Congolese economy, corruption during Mobutu’s era, civil unrest, armed conflicts, the proliferation of unlawful arms among different groups, human rights violations and insecurity, crime, famine, the return diseases like (AIDS, Ebola, malaria and tuberculoses).

The Congo is situated in the heart of Africa, bordering nine African countries. Congo can easily maintain trading and business activities with all its neighbours and other African countries. However, the continuous devastating civil wars in this extremely rich country had delayed any progress the Congolese had predicted for their country. The fact is that not everything that is wrong in the Congo can be blamed on Western imperialism. Africans and Congolese alike are also to blame for their negative stance which further aggravated the Congolese crises since independence. Leadership crises in the Congo, African-Congolese leaders self-centeredness attitude, ethnocentrism, sectional and cessationist tendencies, lack of peoples’ loyalty to the leaders, especially by the Congolese army and the Congolese youths, lack of unity among the masses, lack of sincerity among the people, lack of patience to give peace a

chance to be achieved through gradual change, greediness among the citizens, ideological differences and laziness.

Although the Belgian colonialists were instrumental to the development of all these factors, the Congolese should equally share the blame. They could have learnt from previous mistakes committed by the former leaders in order to avoid the continuous destruction of the country. The Belgian colonialists created the ethnic conflicts in the country by registering the names of the Congolese people according to their tribal origin, which resulted in creating divisions based of ethnicity.

This chapter comprises two parts. In the first part, the theoretical framework of the research is presented, while in the second part, the historical background of the country is provided.

### **Theoretical Framework of the Research**

Political crises can be manifested in several forms and at various levels. Its consequences normally have undesirable results on any nation or countries that can cause destruction to the entire nation causing annihilation of lives, damage to property and, of course, economic disaster for the nation in the long term. This thesis will try to examine the applicability of the Hobson's accumulative theories of the imperialist approach in this regard. The aim of this analysis is to see how far this theory can account for the Congolese political crises from the early 60s up to the end of Mobutu's dictatorial military regime. When the Rwanda-Uganda backed rebel leader, Laurent Désiré Kabila, crushed Mobutu and his military dictatorial regime in 1997, it was the end of a long period of authoritarian dictatorship in the Congo.

## **Problem Statement and Justification**

Having taken a glimpse at the nature of the problems of the Congo (Zaire), it is beneficial to present here the rationale for selecting this topic for this dissertation. This study will explore the negative role played by the Belgian colonialist throughout their colonial era of the Congo, through the colonialists common policy of “divide and rule”, which it implemented in the country to safeguard its vital interests. This study is very important and essential for the readers to know about this matter in terms of the political crises in the Congo (Zaire).

The country gained its independence from Belgium on 30th June 1960. Since then, it has been confronting a series of bitter leadership crises and civil wars. The people of the Congo (Zaire) are also experiencing a despicably miserable life of poverty, epidemic diseases, high rate of child and mortality, unemployment, malnutrition, water pollution and destruction as a result of these political crises. The mismanagement of government officials, the inefficiency of bureaucrats, Mobutu's great involvement in corruption practices, with his civil servants, and the consistent revolts against his dictatorial military regime have all opened the gates to some neighbouring countries and illegal companies from Europe, Canada and from among other imperialist countries elsewhere to exploit the country's vast resources. These serious mistakes might constitute the immediate reasons for the failure of the country to enjoy any tangible and concrete development. Therefore, this study will explore the factors that have led to these serious economic and political problems in the Congo (Zaire). This research is very important in order to know and explain the serious mistakes committed by some members of the Congolese political elite during the crisis, and to reveal the negative role played by imperialists in exacerbating the Congo political crises. The study will also make a few suggestions to solve the

political crises in the Congo (Zaire), which is viewed by all African States as a burning and serious.

### **Research Questions**

This study focuses on the colonial impacts on the Congolese political and economic crises during the period 1960-1997. To identify the impacts, this research addresses the following question:

1. What were the underlying causes and factors for the Congolese political crises during the early days of independence?
2. Why did these crises continue throughout Mobutu's authoritarian military regime and until its downfall in 1997?
3. What was the role played by the imperialists to ignite the Congolese political crises?
4. What was the role played by the Belgian paratroops in the Congolese army mutiny?
5. What was the role played by the national actors in the political crises of the Congo?

### **Significance and Objective of the Research**

This research is very significant because it will focus those areas which have been only touched upon by the political analysts and the scholars in African studies. This study will also highlight some of the important issues that are pointed out and discussed by some scholars who have conducted intensive research and studies on these issues of the Congolese political crises. Beside these, the research will also explain all the factors that led the imperialists and neo-colonialists to plot against

Patrice Lumumba personally which had led to his assassination. It will also explain how the imperialists had put one of the world's greatest corrupt dictators Mobutu Sese Seko in the Congo palace and helped him for long to maintain his dictatorship.

### **Literature Review**

Undoubtedly, some writers had enumerated several crucial factors that led to the political crises in the Congo (Zaire). Some of the factors which are often mentioned by them include the Congolese army mutiny immediately after independence, Mobutu's military coup d'états, and the negative measures of the imperialists on the Congolese economic growth. The other factors that are generally pointed out by some researchers in this area include conflict of the ethnicity, the Congolese political elite's self-centred behaviour toward one another, the politicians' lower educational achievement, inadequate training among the leaders, and many other such factors. However, the imperialists' creation of the "divide and rule policy" was the biggest of all factors that led to the Congolese political crises in the early 60s and throughout Mobutu's military regime in the Congo (Zaire).

The underlying factors behind Congolese political crises were interconnected since the independence of the Congo in 1960. Some scholars have identified and explained the factors for the political crises of the Congo. Alan Wells in his book: *The Coups d'état in Theory and Practice: Independent Black Africa in the Igbo*, described the Belgian implication on the ethnic conflicts among the Congolese communities. Their penetration into the country and colonization of the people of the Congo is the main factor that explains the political crises of the Congo due to the Belgian colonial policy of rigid ethnic identification. They adopted this policy for their own interests. They had divided the Congolese not only during the colonial period but the impact of

that policy continued throughout the country's independence to the present time as well. He said that when the Belgian colonialists penetrated and colonized the country, they immediately created or developed a policy based on rigid ethnic identification, which functioned throughout their presence in the Congo for the sake of their own interests.

Ethnic divisions among the Congolese had always been fluid: the concept of who was or was not a member of a specific ethnic group had never been as rigid as the Europeans believed. <sup>1</sup>Yet the Belgian administration acted in the Congo as if rigid distinctions did exist. This explicitly reveals that the Belgian colonialists, like other Western colonialists, adopted the policy of "divide and rule". African-Congolese indigenous identification cards were issued according to the ethnic group to which nationalities belonged, and they were required to supply this information when filling different office forms. The Belgian colonial emphasis on tribal identity helped to reinforce the feeling of tribalism and ethnicity among the African-Congolese. This explanation gives a clear picture of how "the divide and rule policy" of the Belgian colonialists had been the main factor for the subsequent ethnic conflicts in the country.<sup>2</sup>

The negative religious impact was another factor which triggered the Congolese political elite to distrust one another since their early Missionary school days in the Congo. The Congolese students in the Missionary schools had unknowingly emulated the Belgium Socialist Party's notion of anti-cleric and pro-cleric, and grew up with this attitude. The Belgian priests had also favoured the pro-cleric students, and identified the anti-cleric students even after their graduation from

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<sup>1</sup> George. B. N., 1991. *Africa Betrayed*. New York: Transnational Publishers Inc. pp. 34-35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, . pp. 35-36.

the Missionary schools. Let it be remembered that the Congo is a dominantly Christian country, and the priests have considerable respect and tremendous influence on the Congolese society. This idea of pro-clerics and anti-clerics had negatively influenced the behaviour of these Mission students toward each other, since those early school days, because they grew up divided and hated one another. Consequently, this disunity and hatred played its negative role; particularly these divided Mission students were the ones who took over the country's leadership from the Belgian colonialists.

The fire of rivalry flamed among these new politicians, when the Belgian colonial administration in the Congo came to know their divisions and hatred to each other, even before independence. This colonial administration in the Congo started to undermine the possible unity of these new leaders throughout their political party's formulations and political campaigns for the leadership of the Congo's independence. The divergence among the Congolese new political elite enabled the Belgian priests in the Congo to utilize the entire crisis for their own vital interests, as both groups of the Congolese new leaders were under supervision of the Belgian-Congolese Churches.

Another ideological factor which enabled the Belgian colonial administration to intervene and mismanage the Congolese political crises took place during the preparation of the country for independence. The Belgian colonial government had intentionally cultivated Western ideological consciousness and the religious divisive idea of anti-cleric and pro-cleric among the Congolese political elite, who were categorized as pro-socialists, pro-communist, anti-capitalist, anti-Western, or, above all, anti-Americans. This imperialist drive was the root cause for fueling fire on the Congolese political crises since 1960, and throughout Mobutu's authoritarian military regime.

Thomas Kanza discussed how the division among the Congolese political elite had undermined the unity of the Congolese leaders, by emphasizing that in the Congo the crown and the cross of Christ has always gone hand in hand with money. Having brought about a split in the M.N.C (the Movement National Congolese Party), the anti-Lumumbist forces went on to create a new movement, bringing together a kind of federation among a number of political groups that based themselves on tribalism, Christiansen or anti-communism.

The impact of both colonial financial interests and the Catholic Church was felt within the various Congolese party committees themselves, pro-cleric or anti-cleric alike.<sup>3</sup> Yet another reason for the political crises in the Congo (Zaire) was the Belgian imperialist inculcation of the power struggling habit into the minds of the Congolese political elite during the pre and the post independence eras. For instance, there was a struggle for power between the late Patrice Lumumba and other Congolese political elite, from the early days of independence, and until his assassination on 17 January 1961. In addition, the struggle for power continued even after Patrice Lumumba's death among the Congolese political elites during the crisis 1960-1965 and throughout Mobutu's authoritarian military regime 1965-1997 This factor had not only created feelings of hatred, but it also encouraged these politicians to shine to eliminate each other, and provided valuable opportunities to the Western imperialist-colonialist to monitor and seize opportunities to serve their own interests through the colonial policy of "divide and rule".

The Congolese political elite developed the idea of eliminating their opponents by any means and regardless of the consequences, just for the narrow fulfillment of their selfish desire for leadership. Thomas Kanza explained how the Congolese party

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 36-37