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## **Chapter 8**

### **Congo-Gauteng: Congolese Migrants in South Africa**

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#### **Introduction**

This chapter gives an overview of migration from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to South Africa concentrating on one region, Gauteng. Our research is primarily based on ethnographic fieldwork by the authors, with additional material from the library and the press.

Outside of frontier states, South Africa is the principal destination for the Congolese. Migration there is the subject of a voluminous body of literature (e.g. Gelderblom et al. 2006). Yet despite this and the large numbers of Congolese in South Africa, relatively little has been written about this migration stream. People on the move represent a striking feature of contemporary sociality (Urry 2010) and links between the DRC and South Africa will, we believe, form an important 'south-south' relationship in the new century. Looking at the concrete aspirations and activities of Congolese migrants, we attempt a broad overview as a basis for further investigation. Congolese migration to South Africa has the potential to develop mutually beneficial contacts between South Africa, the DRC and the broader Southern African Development Community (SADC) area. Yet the prevailing system

promotes negative outcomes, penalizing and criminalizing socially useful labour at the bottom of the social scale, while rewarding and consolidating a violent rentier class at the top.

### **Congo-Paris and Other Literature on Congolese Migrants.**

While Congolese migration to South Africa is relatively unstudied, Congolese migrants to other destinations have received more attention. These include the 'Bana Lunda' who migrated to Lunda Norte in Angola to mine diamonds in the 1990s (e.g. De Boeck 1999; **De Monnier et al. 2008**). Also notable are studies of migration by youths such as the *sapeurs* and *mikilistes* from Kinshasa and Congo-Brazzaville (Gandolou 1989; Gondola 1999; Trapido 2011). Most relevant here, however, is MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga's Congo-Paris, *Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law* (2000). With its highly accessible mix of vivid ethnography and practical theory, Congo-Paris was a model for us to aspire to. Like them, we are interested in the economy as an important modality of human activity, while investigating 'the economic' as embedded social facts that can only be understood in the wider texture of human life. We also believe that migration has important implications for African politics in the twenty-first century.

Our study differs from Congo-Paris in that we concentrate more on class divisions within the Congolese migrant community. The migration of Congolese to France was overwhelmingly from the Lingala-speaking west of the country. Migration to South Africa reflects the overall demography of Congo, with large numbers of migrants from both the western and eastern,

Swahili-speaking, parts of Congo. The difference between west and east has become an important political divide in the DRC, with easterners and especially people from the south-east province of Katanga being more favourable to the Kabila regime (Inaka forthcoming). The linguistic divide may render class tensions more acute in South Africa.

There appear to be fewer spaces of contact between elite and non-elite migrants in South Africa than there were in Europe during the 1990s and 2000s, when it was common to encounter the children of senior *Mobutiste* cadres hanging out in local bars. This is surely related to the general pattern of geographical segregation between rich and poor that is characteristic of South Africa.

In Congo-Paris the authors claim that Congolese migrants have a 'counter-hegemonic' relationship to the powers that be – casting migrants as resisting elites both in the two Congos and in France. They draw on both Antonio Gramsci and James Scott, but MacGaffey herself in earlier work on Zaire (for example 1987) contrasted an entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, based in an expanding informal economy,<sup>i</sup> with a parasitic state bourgeoisie whose revenues came from rent seeking or even predation. Our chapter disputes such a division; indeed rentiers – who can impose and benefit from a monopoly of or restricted access to an economic resource – are best placed to reap the informal economy's rewards (Hyslop 2005). The state has been a crucial vector of informal economic activity in Zaire (Reno 1998). Even where 'the state' has been entirely replaced by smaller-scale forms of authority, it is questionable to view informal economic agents as emancipatory.

Raeymaekers (2010) shows how Nande traders of North Kivu, a group taken

by MacGaffey (1987, 1997) to epitomise the resistant entrepreneur, were themselves inexorably drawn into the same patterns of rent seeking and violence once undertaken by state elites.

It cannot be denied, however, that ordinary people have turned to the informal economy to put food on the table. We propose to see the informal economy, not as an entity with a single set of implications for society, but as a mode of economic behaviour. Informality is accessed by different social groups on different terms often corresponding to class positions. Class and conflicts of interest should be integral to how we think about the informal economy. Congolese migrants have an important relationship to informality. Migrants to South Africa are far from being a homogenous social group. Their access to 'the informal economy' is shaped by their class position and general statements about the positive or negative potential migration must take this into consideration.

## **Background**

The DRC is the largest member of SADC, both in terms of area and population. With its nearly seventy million potential consumers, its cultural prowess, its globally important reserves of cobalt, uranium and rare non-ferrous metals, and its vast hydroelectric potential, the DRC offers SADC a route to an optimistic future – culturally vibrant, jobs-rich, high-tech, low-carbon. Yet, while it is commonplace to assert that the DRC has this huge potential, it is evident that it is not currently able to deliver on this potential.

This distance between aspiration and the actuality can only be understood through the country's turbulent history.

In the early colonial period the Congo was marked by widespread violence, as the colonial state used ever more extreme methods to obtain commodities from the interior, above all wild rubber. Estimates of excess mortality in this period vary between three and twenty-one million (Ndaywel é Nziem 1998; Hochschild 2005; Vellut 2006; White 2011). These exactions may be seen as state-led 'primitive accumulation' – an act of dispossession that creates the conditions necessary for capitalism (Marx 1961 [1867]). Thus in the late colonial period the Belgian Colony was relatively industrialized and affluent, with the highest proportion of wage labourers in Sub-Saharan Africa outside South Africa (Prunier 2009). However, all of this came to an end at independence.

The Belgians and other western powers were alarmed (and apparently surprised) that the Congolese people had voted for parties and candidates that promised economic independence from the former colonial power, and the country was immediately destabilized. The elected prime minister, Patrice Lumumba, was assassinated by Belgian forces. Elites in the mineral-rich Katanga province tried to secede, with the tacit encouragement of western interests; the army rebelled and the country was plunged into chaos. Mobutu Sese Seko, the head of the army, who had been on the Central intelligence Agency (CIA) payroll since before independence, took power in 1965. Maintaining close relations with Washington and from the 1970s onward with Paris, he was able to call in favours each time his power was threatened.

Mobutu was able to keep the lid on for a while, curbing inflation, reducing the deficit through a managed devaluation (Young and Turner 1985) and instituting a moderately successful nationalization of the mines in 1966.<sup>ii</sup> But by the mid 1970s the country was once again in a downward spiral, as a huge fall in copper prices, then the main export and an ill-conceived distribution of foreign-owned property to regime cronies, took their toll. The regime limped on, and when Mobutu was finally chased from power in 1997, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was, in real terms, less than 20 per cent of what it had been at independence (Exenberger and Hartman 2013: 31) and the country owed its creditors nearly thirteen billion U.S. dollars.

Since the fall of Mobutu the country has been characterized, once again, by extreme violence. Disruption caused by the Congo wars of 1996 to 1997 and 1998 to 2002, and by the turbulent 'peace' that came afterwards, has led to an estimated excess mortality of 3.9 million people – more than anywhere else since the end of World War II (Coghlan et al. 2006). Most of these deaths have not been caused by direct violence, but rather relate to events that are 'economic' and 'political' as much as 'military'. These can, to some degree, be seen as an extension of trends that were already in place before the war: the collapse of roads and infrastructure, the decline in food production, the mass migrations of a besieged peasantry (abandoning the countryside en masse because of insecurity and informal 'taxation' by a plethora of armed groups) and the disappearance of anything resembling a public health system.

Even outside the eastern regions that have been the primary theatre of conflict, the country is extraordinarily dilapidated. There has been no census

since 1984; there is no road between the country's largest cities, Kinshasa (seven to ten million people) and Lubumbashi (around three million). Mbuji-Mayi, a city of several millions, has no piped water; Kinshasa suffers power cuts lasting several months a year; and most of the population has been reduced to a level of bare subsistence.

### **Migration, Outline Trends**

Given the hardship of life in the DRC – which was ranked 187<sup>th</sup> or last in United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Index (2011) – migration is an obviously attractive option. That being said, most Congolese would prefer to migrate north to Europe or North America, than to South Africa. This preference is clearly related to the higher standard of living there, but it extends well beyond simple economic calculations.

Europe and the rich North – known as *mikili* in Lingala – have become the focus for a highly elaborated set of myths and rituals on the part of both urban youth and various elites. Restrictive migration policies in 'the west', however, mean that entry into these countries is now almost impossible, even for relatively well-off Congolese. As a result, they have increasingly turned to 'south-south' migration, with important flows of commercial, educational and vocational migration taking place between the DRC and emerging countries – notably Brazil, Turkey, China, India and, above all, South Africa.

There are no reliable figures for the number of Congolese living in South Africa. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2006 estimated that 23,000 Congolese asylum seekers and 17,000

refugees lived there, while the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants World Refugee Survey 2009 estimated the population of refugees and asylum seekers from the DRC at 33,000. Both these estimates draw on a baseline survey of 2003 (Belvedere 2003). It is obvious that this survey must have missed very large numbers of people who would be contained within a larger definition of the Congolese community living in South Africa. First, it excludes those who are not refugees or claiming asylum – students, many migrant workers, those who have become South African nationals and most members of the elite. Second, it excludes a large group of people who have overstayed their visa and any whose claim for asylum has been rejected but who continue to live on there clandestinely. Finally, it excludes those people, perhaps not numerous, who have bypassed official points of entry and live in South Africa without documentation.

We now examine some factors relevant to a consideration of class among Congolese migrants to Gauteng.

### **Particularities of Class in the DRC and Abroad**

Theories of class are often grouped into two schools: a Weberian emphasis on status and political power and a Marxist emphasis on relationship to the means of production. It is often taken as a vindication of the Weberian approach that, in states like Zaire/DRC, political power seems to have preceded economic power (Schatzberg 1980); but one could just as well argue in Marxist terms that the power of the ruling class there is based on extracting rent from the means of production. This might be linked to a third

important theorist of class, Veblen (1912) offers a third approach to class, with his emphasis on forms of conspicuous consumption among a non-productive status group of 'predators', a class who might be also characterized as rentiers. Our class model, with a predatory non-productive class at the top, most resembles Veblen. This essay will consider 'money', 'status' and 'power' where it seems appropriate. All three elements should be included in a full account of social class.

For the purpose of identifying divisions within the Congolese migrant community, we propose a three-class model – a class of hustlers and survivors at the bottom similar to those Hart (1973) once termed an 'urban sub-proletariat' (see also Davis 2006); a class of professionals, traders and moderately successful criminals in the middle; and at the top an elite class, composed of wealthy and politically well-connected individuals, who live, or spend significant periods, in South Africa, but whose livelihood is primarily guaranteed by access to rents in the DRC. Our conclusions are tentative and our terminology reflects this, referring to these groups simply as 'the bottom', 'the middle', and 'the top'. Within these broad categories we look at particular occupational groups – e.g. security guards, professionals, or criminals.

The social class of migrants originate when they leave the DRC obviously affects the positions they occupy when they get to South Africa. However lowly the social position of Congolese migrants in South Africa may appear, they rarely come from the poorest backgrounds in the DRC. Migration everywhere requires more resources than those at the very bottom can often acquire (Massey and Durant 2006). This is true of migration to South Africa. While Congolese people often see this as a more accessible option compared

with getting into the rich north, coming to South Africa from the DRC is quite expensive; at their closest the two countries are nearly 2,000 kilometres apart.

Exploring class in the DRC can sometimes feel like entering a looking glass world, where the disasters of the post-independence state have pulled ordinary social terms far away from their conventional 'western' meanings (De Boeck and Plissart 2004). A wide range of professions – civil servants, school teachers, tax inspectors, etc. – should not be seen as being especially privileged. Salaries are absurdly low compared to the cost of living; public servants are generally paid less than 200 U.S. dollars a month and this often comes with several months or even years of arrears. A friend of the authors, who worked for the municipal tax office in Kinshasa, received a monthly salary of 150 U.S. dollars and this was not paid for 7 months out of 12. Yet penury has not necessarily disrupted class hierarchies. In relative terms, professionals are still better placed than the great mass of hawkers, vegetable gardeners, peanut sellers, sweeps, sentinels, roadside cooks, moonshine brewers, drug sellers and prostitutes who struggle to wrest a living from the DRC's urban centres. But this advantage is due, in large measure, not to their feeble salaries but to other privileges that they enjoy. One advantage is that jobs in the tax office or for the state power company can be a source of informal fees. But the most important advantages concern property and social connections. The current crop of downtrodden professionals are quite often the children of an earlier generation of professionals who came to maturity when housing was cheaper, when salaries were paid and before runaway inflation took hold. Thus a badly-paid civil servant is probably in a position to

live at home with his parents. He is also more likely than most to have access to circuits of migrant capital.

So general impoverishment in Congo presents a counter-intuitive set of social facts – while the middle classes have been reduced to near subsistence level, those beneath them have also experienced a fall in their standard of living and relative class positions have remained similar. For migrants, the opposite may be true. A considerable improvement of their material standard of living in South Africa often coincides with downward mobility in terms of relative position and occupational class. It is not uncommon for car guards in South Africa to have been professionals with a degree in Congo. But they often earn much more in tips from South African drivers than their salary from the Congolese state.

Informal and illegal economic activities often play an important role in migrants' lives. These may be characterized as 'survival strategies' undertaken by people at the bottom of the heap. The various social groups relate to informality differently and the degree of choice they exercise is crucial. Those at the bottom are involved in what we call 'forced informality'. Arriving without the money needed to regularize their situation, they are prevented by law from finding formal employment. The informal opportunities available restrict their earning potential while leaving them vulnerable in other ways. Those in the middle also rely on informal incomes, but they have a greater degree of choice about this. The financial capital they can draw on when entering the informal economy is greater. Doctors, engineers and others working as professionals in South Africa commonly derive significant income from illegal or unregistered businesses. But the formal economy gives them

access to banking, credit, secure legal standing, regular employment, etc. They often obtain their work permits, their regular status, by informal and illegal means – at a price beyond migrants who lack significant capital reserves. Those at the top live almost entirely within the formal sphere in South Africa. Yet, in the extra-legal space that is the DRC, they can plunder national resources, using South Africa as a secure place to manage their assets.

We now place various empirically observed occupations within these rough-hewn categories of ‘the bottom’ ‘the middle’ and ‘the top’.

### *Those at the Bottom*

All the Congolese migrants we met at the bottom end of the social scale are claiming asylum in South Africa. Often arriving with a visitor’s permit, they claim asylum once they are admitted to the country. Asylum-seeker status has several disadvantages, especially no right to work while the claim is being processed, and most claims appear to get nowhere. Migrants in this category are condemned to ‘forced informality’, the most direct cause of their low social mobility and poverty. Other vectors of class formation, however, oblige these migrants to adopt such a status in the first place, above all capital. All the other options for remaining in South Africa, each of which leads more easily to regular status, involve money. Renewing a visitor’s permit requires substantial income, while other options carrying the possibility of working legally also require considerable resources and/or special skills (as we will see with professional migrants).

Those at the bottom have no right to work, yet they must earn money to eat. Sometimes they work in purely informal occupations, as car guards, cutting hair on the street, prostitutes etc. Often, however, they work illegally for South African companies, above all in security or as bouncers and waitresses. These illegal jobs require access to forged papers. Gauteng has a reputation among the Congolese as a source of forged documents, which can be obtained with startling ease and very cheaply (*see below*). The forgers perform a vital role without which the lives of many Congolese at the bottom of Gauteng's heap would be even more difficult. Their services are sometimes referred to as the 'embassy of Yeoville', after the Johannesburg district where many Congolese forgers live.

Henri and Manassé are car park attendants working purely in the informal economy. They spend long hours working their pitch outside a shopping centre. On a good day they can make 200 rand, though the amount fluctuates a lot. One of their most serious problems is competition for their pitch, especially since in Gauteng car guarding is often thought of as a job for indigenous South Africans. Partly as a result, Henri and Manassé pay out a significant sum to a gangster who ensures that they retain their pitch. Both Henri and Manassé are from genuinely poor backgrounds in Kinshasa and seem less inclined than most to complain about their circumstances in Gauteng.

Jean-Pierre comes from Kasai in the south central part of the DRC. He works as a guard for various properties where large amounts of cash are stored. He lives in Yeoville, although his job takes him to other parts of Gauteng. Like many security guards, he claims to have been a soldier in the

FAZ (Forces Armées Zairoises). This appears to be true – he has photos of himself as a younger man in an officer's uniform. Most such claims, however, are false. The job is extremely unpleasant: Jean-Pierre has to carry a pump-action shotgun and to work nights standing for long stretches without a break, always on the alert against attack. South African law on the hiring of security guards has been tightened in recent years and Jean-Pierre had to purchase a suite of false documents in order to obtain the post (*see below*).

Saddam (a rather common name in the DRC) also works as a security guard outside a small hotel and restaurant, directing cars, dealing with drunken customers and the occasional wino. Compared with other security jobs, Saddam has it good – the premises are in a salubrious part of Pretoria, piles of cash are not kept on site and the clientele is solid in the main, middle-aged and unlikely to cause trouble. The job is not dangerous and much of the time he can sit down, but it does involve working all night, every night, except Mondays.

Like everyone we met in this class, Saddam and Jean-Pierre claimed asylum when they arrived in South Africa. These claims are neither granted nor rejected, but are renewed eternally. In 2010, when the Department of Home Affairs was on strike, Saddam was fined 1,000 rand for late submission of his renewal documents. The fine was non-negotiable even though the only reason for his lateness was the prolonged strike. Saddam's asylum-seeker status excludes him from working in the formal economy. He is relatively lucky in that his employer is a fellow Central African who does not require him to provide large numbers of documents. This contrasts with many other workers in the security sector who have to procure false documents.

Saddam and Jean-Pierre highlight the paradoxes of social mobility between Gauteng and the DRC. Saddam worked as a school teacher in the DRC and has a high school diploma and teacher-training certificate. He speaks very good English and spends his spare time reading novels and detective stories, mostly in English. Jean-Pierre was in the army. For both, working as security guards in Gauteng could be classed as downward mobility. Yet Saddam's salary as a state-employed school teacher in Kinshasa was less than fifty U.S. dollars a month, much too low to live on, while the chaos and disintegration of the Forces Armées du Zaïre made survival incredibly difficult for career soldiers. As security guards in Gauteng, Saddam and Jean Pierre are paid 2,500 to 3,000 rand a month, an average wage for full-time employees in this sector. While this is very low, it is enough to survive on. Saddam spends about 1,000 rand on food each month, buying in bulk and travelling to Johannesburg (where provisions are cheaper). When he can, he sends home 1,000 rand to his parents and/or to the mother of his child, all of whom live in Kinshasa. He pays 1,000 rand a month on rent, which buys him space in a shared room in a downtown area of Central Pretoria that is popular with migrants.

Saddam's neighbourhood also has a large floating population; there are never less than fourteen people staying in this three-bedroom flat and often many more. The block is known as Hong Kong among local Congolese, because it is so crowded. It is notorious for drug deals, and the smell of Indian hemp often wafts past as one crosses the communal balcony. When Saddam is not there, the room is used by local prostitutes. These women are, in the main, South African, but they seem well integrated into the Congolese

milieu – many of them can speak passable Lingala and dance to the Congolese rumba in the bars. Some of them may be seen in intimate mobile video-phone recordings, which are passed around Congolese men in the area. The flat is also home to a thriving community of cockroaches and some people who stay there suffer from a skin condition linked to parasitic insects.

Rents per square metre are no cheaper than in more affluent areas nearby, but the flats are much more crowded. Rents in dilapidated downtown areas – Sunnyside in Pretoria or Yeoville and Hillbrow in Johannesburg – are appreciably higher than in poorer outlying areas, especially in the townships. Despite this, the Congolese show a marked preference for living in town. One reason is convenience, since these districts are closer to sources of money, but there are also important historical and social motives. When apartheid ended, formerly white areas like Yeoville and Sunnyside became available to mixed groups, including large influxes of migrants from other parts of Africa, so that from the beginning these areas was not dominated by indigenous South Africans. This was unlike the situation in the townships, which had been reserved for non-whites. This trend was strengthened by the normal pattern of 'path dependence' in choice of habitation (Grafmayer and Isaac 1992), whereby the more members of a community settle in an area, the more likely it is that others with social ties to them will also settle there. This is linked to a third reason why Congolese prefer these areas. Like other immigrants, they do not feel safe in the townships. These places, such as Mamelodi to East Pretoria or Alexandria next to Sandton, saw some of the worst xenophobic violence in 2008. While the inhabitants of downtown areas experienced

considerable unpleasantness, no one ever felt under physical threat because of their origins.

### ***Those in the Middle***

Middle-class migrants constitute a large and somewhat problematic category. Included in this group are professional migrants, by which we mean those groups – essentially health professionals and engineers – who have continued practicing their professions in Gauteng. There are also a smaller number of Congolese who have found work in other middle-class occupations – accountants, bank clerks, lawyers, university lecturers – but in these cases they tend to have gone to university in South Africa and often have South African citizenship. In addition, there are a number of clandestine workers, notably smugglers and fraudsters, who are sufficiently successful to acquire a bourgeois lifestyle. There is also considerable crossover between these groups and independent businessmen. Many professionals have created businesses and many professionals and businessmen are involved in fraud and other informal and illegal activities.

### ***Professionals***

While many of those who migrate to Gauteng from the DRC hold university degrees, only a relatively narrow set of graduates are able to use these when living in South Africa. The two main categories are, as stated above, health professionals – above all doctors – and engineers. Unlike other graduates,

these two groups have in the recent past often been able to obtain work permits for South Africa. Their legal status is thus essential to maintaining their class position once in South Africa. The routes these professionals take to obtain work permits are various. Engineers working in the mining sector were sometimes issued with work permits designed to fill skill shortages there. Other ways of obtaining papers are less straightforward. One common practice used by doctors and engineers is to retake their final qualifications – a practice known as *kosukola diplôme*, ‘to clean the degree’. This does not guarantee a work permit in itself, but it does give the professional connections that can indirectly lead to one. Hence it is not uncommon to meet engineers studying in South Africa who have in fact already graduated with long careers in the state mining sector in Congo. Spending a year or more obtaining new qualifications is expensive of course, and only available to those who have significant financial resources.

Another route to a work permit is through claiming asylum. This too requires resources and connections. The procedure involves a contact in Home Affairs who can ensure that an asylum claimant is given refugee status – which grants the right to work – within a reasonably short time. We have heard that this service is arranged by corrupt lawyers, but one of our informants gave us access to a syndicate working within the department itself. The minimum fee was quoted as 4,000 to 4,500 rand for ‘normal’ applicants, although interestingly doctors were charged more for this service – a figure of 8,000 to 10,000 rand was quoted – presumably because they are considered to have a guaranteed earning potential once they get the right to work.

This illustrates an important theme of our essay. Informal and illegal economies are used by all sectors of the migrant population. The classes differ in the degree of choice they exercise and the terms of access to informal economies. Whereas informality is a trap for those at the bottom, professionals like doctors and engineers are able to turn the system to their advantage. This is once again related to money. These groups come to informality with more resources to begin with. These may be financial – while doctors and engineers in Congo have a hard time, they or their families can usually assemble the money needed for a once-off effort. They are also related to earning potential – doctors and engineers could commit a significant sum to bribing officials because they are reasonably confident of finding a job once they obtain a work permit. This confidence would not be warranted for other types of graduates in South Africa.

Another path to gaining work used by doctors is called *Locam*. This is an informal apprenticeship that many Congolese doctors go through in Gauteng, thereby easing the financial burden on individuals. Junior doctors who have qualified in the DRC, but have not yet passed the conversion exam (the 'South African Health Professionals Council Board Exam for foreign medical practitioners'), may work illegally for a fellow countryman who has established his medical practice there. In one case, the doctor – for a fee – provided accommodation, mentoring and information about the process of becoming accepted as a doctor there.

Doctors who migrate to South Africa retain the class position they occupied in the DRC, but they have undergone an important material improvement. Doctors working for the state in the DRC are, on average, paid

300 U.S. dollars a month, a salary that is often not paid. Within the private sector, salaries may be somewhat better, but there are very few positions available. Congolese doctors working in Gauteng by contrast quote an average starting salary of 25,000 rand a month. Many Congolese physicians in Gauteng own several properties and luxury cars, take European holidays, etc.

The presence of such a large body of Congolese medics in South Africa, combined of course with the dilapidated state of the DRC's health infrastructure, has helped make South Africa the number one destination for 'health tourism' by Congolese people in need of treatments that are either unavailable or considered unreliable in the DRC. Indeed, some more entrepreneurial medics have created thriving businesses linked to this health tourism. One doctor has bought several flats in and around Pretoria, which patients may rent while they wait for treatment in his clinic and where they may convalesce after they are discharged from hospital. The flats are also rented to visiting businessmen and junior doctors from the DRC who have yet to get a foothold in South Africa.

In the case of engineers, the collapse of the state mining sector in the 1990s meant that most engineers working in the DRC lost their jobs. Thus migration to South Africa for them represents an improvement in their circumstances from many points of view. The first significant cohort to arrive in South Africa consisted of mining engineers who had been employed by the state copper mining company, Gecamines. The company ceased to function in the early 1990s, a collapse that coincided with the end of apartheid, encouraging many skilled workers to leave the DRC for South Africa. We

have anecdotal evidence of others such as electrical engineers, architects, computing engineers and the like working in sectors such as telecommunications, construction and manufacturing. Some engineers have created their own companies, most often in construction, bringing together plumbers, carpenters and architects, while often drawing illegally on skilled Congolese migrants from the bottom class discussed above. It has been reported to us that many Congolese engineers or technicians like to have white South African business associates, believing that this will win them more clients.<sup>iii</sup>

### *Fraudsters and Frappeurs*

The various groups of Congolese fraudsters and smugglers are too large to ignore but hard to place within the class model we have proposed here. At the bottom end, many small forgers and people smugglers – *tata ngulu*, *tindikeurs* – are not doing well at all. At the very top one finds celebrity fraudsters who might be categorized as belonging to the elite. While their illegal activities lay them open to the threat of arrest, many of the more successful fraudsters have been able to purchase legitimate businesses, both in the DRC and in South Africa, and this justifies our placing of this occupational group in the ‘middle’ category. A *frappeur* (also known as *maître*) is someone who practices *frappe*, the French for strike. In this context *frappe* (and its numerous synonyms *kop*, *mayuya*, etc.) indicates a semantic field roughly corresponding to the English word fraud. Typically it would include: cheque fraud, known as *chekula*, stealing bank account details (known as *internet*),

counterfeiting money (a specialism of Cameroonian criminals known as *feymen*, but often involving Congolese) document fraud, forms of resource fraud and so on. Some of the most successful *frappeurs* are very well-known; and several pose as successful businessmen.

One of these, Nosy Muamba, was a former president of the Congolese football league. He was involved in a syndicate importing counterfeit currency into Zaire, a crime for which he was tried and found guilty in 1995. After the collapse of the Mobutu regime, he came to South Africa, where he became famous as the owner of a Johannesburg nightclub, *Sankai*. He was also part of a predominantly Cameroonian syndicate involved in counterfeiting. He was arrested once again and charged, and is currently serving a prison term.

There is a strong association between *frappe* and music. Indeed for the last thirty years the big names in Congolese popular music have received the majority of their income from various forms of praise-singing for fraudsters in the diaspora. While many of these figures lived in Europe, South Africa has also played host to a significant number. One of them is Tony Kabongo, a practitioner of *internet*. Tony has been in open rivalry with a London-based fraudster called Zadio Kongolo who is a celebrated patron of music.<sup>iv</sup> Zadio is famous for giving the bandleader JB Mpiana a staggering amount of money during a concert in Dublin, a feat that earned him the name Zadio '*arrêtez le temps*' ('stop-time Zadio'), because it took so long for him to press banknote after banknote on JB's head. At another concert, in Kinshasa, Zadio again gave large amounts and was hailed by the band with his nickname. Tony, while visiting Kinshasa for the concert, followed Zadio onto the stage and gave even more money, after which the quick-witted JB awarded him the

name of 'Tony *rachetez le temps*' ('buy-back-time Tony'). Tony is also alleged to have flown a Ferrari from Johannesburg to Kinshasa just to use it to arrive at a concert.

The *frappeur* lifestyle is extremely unstable. Indeed *frappe* is often linked to witchcraft, and the precipitous decline of once-wealthy *frappeurs* suggests to many that their occult contracts have run their course. Nevertheless, many successful *frappeurs* have used their money to buy properties and businesses in South Africa and the DRC. Tony Kabongo was arrested in 2010. While most of his assets were in his wife's name, she, on becoming his ex-wife, decided not to share them with him. But he had managed to save other assets and now lives in Mbuji Mayi and owns a toilet paper factory in Kinshasa. Another famous South Africa-based *frappeur* Bado Martens, '*l'Elephant du Golf*', now owns numerous businesses in Kinshasa, including a construction company, a bakery and one of the largest printers in the city.

*Frappe* has an ambivalent status for the Congolese in that, if pushed, most people would express the view that such activities are wrong. This view is reinforced by *frappeurs'* occult associations. Like the musicians they associate with, *frappeurs* are perceived to be enthusiastic users of *nkisi* – immoral occult devices that draw on ancestral power to grant temporal success. But some fraudsters, whether resident in Europe or South Africa, have become cultural icons in Kinshasa. This iconic status is not directly related to their fraudulent activities, but is rather linked to the lifestyle that fraud supports – giving money to musicians, wearing the latest fashions from Europe and Japan, and courting famous beauties. This ambivalence contrasts

with attitudes to crimes such as burglary, which are seen as being not only highly immoral, but also crass and unsophisticated. Crimes of violence are strongly associated in the Congolese mind with indigenous black South Africans – whom they see as being pointlessly violent – or with Nigerians whose ruthlessness in pursuit of their business interests Congolese criminals find it hard to condone. As one informant put it, ‘For the Nigerians it’s “you touch my woman, we can talk about it, but you touch my business – I’ll kill you”’.

Diamond smuggling and diamond fraud are mostly performed by migrants from the diamond-rich province of East Kasai. One smuggler expressed the view that the permits required by law to import diamonds to South Africa were ‘*pour les colons*’, a phrase we might translate as ‘only for the big shots’. Importers without permits obviously occupy an inferior social position to those who trade diamonds legally. But these traders should not be placed in our bottom category. Even these smaller, clandestine dealers must travel regularly between Kasai and Gauteng and smugglers often spend their money in relatively ‘bourgeois’ ways. For example, we are aware of one smuggler who also owns a boutique in Mbuji Mayi, the capital of East Kasai, which he stocks with articles purchased in Johannesburg. In this context, a form of fraud known as *litraka* has developed that exploits the clandestine trade in diamonds. Its practitioners form a relationship with the South African police. The dealer sells smuggled diamonds to a punter in South Africa who will then be stopped by the police and searched almost immediately after the deal. In this way both the fee and the diamonds are then recuperated by the syndicate. Sometimes persons suspected of making a deal will be reported by

others to 'their' cops, in the hope of a windfall profit. This happened to us after drinking a beer with a well-known diamond smuggler in a Yeoville bar. As we left, the police arrived and without explanation or excuse immediately started searching us.

### ***Those at the Top***

We have placed two groups within the 'top' class of Congolese migrants in South Africa. The first are the so-called '*nouveaux riches*', who made money from trade links to South Africa from the 1990s. The second group, 'the political elite', consists of politicians who have spent significant periods in South Africa or who have kept their families in the country. Their wealth and income is predominantly based on rents accruing to their political power. There is considerable overlap between these groups – many politicians establish family members in trade, using money acquired from rents, while most traders profit from rents, in part, through the quasi-monopolies they enjoy due to their political connections.

### *Nouveaux Riches of Katanga in Gauteng*

'Nouveaux riches' refers here to a group of businessmen who have specialized in importing goods from South Africa into Katanga since the late 1990s: in particular, food, drink, clothes and cars. Trade between Katanga and South Africa has increased exponentially since the early 1990s. Among

the first Congolese to take up this option were truck drivers involved in illicit cobalt traffic (MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000). Katanga has the world's most important reserves of this strategic mineral, which is needed for manufacturing precision steel. Ethnic politics in Katanga eventually caused the state mining company to collapse, when thousands of skilled personnel from East Kasai were driven out in a pogrom against 'non-autochthones'.<sup>vi</sup> In this process, more and more of the mineral was smuggled abroad. On the way back, these drivers started filling their trucks with consumer goods, primarily food and clothes, to sell in Zaire/DRC. As the trade's profitability became clear, a class of merchants emerged, the *nouveaux riches*, who specialized in importing goods from Gauteng to Katanga. This trade took off in earnest after Laurent Kabila had taken power. The *nouveaux riches* do not appear to have started South African businesses. But they use South Africa as a base for hoarding assets and very often keep their families there.

Given the relatively good transport links between Katanga and Gauteng, one might ask why this trade only took off in the 1990s, particularly since extensive links between them existed before independence. The Katangese themselves claim that Mobutu blocked the commerce in order to favour the west of the country. But this is unlikely – during the late Mobutu period, for example, a noticeable trade developed in second-hand cars imported to Lubumbashi from Dubai via Tanzania and Zambia, which suggests that the frontier was open much of the time (Kadima and Kalombo 1995).

One *nouveau riche*, whose family is based in Pretoria, has become a deputy in Katanga's regional parliament, representing the ruling party, the

PPRD (Partie pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie). Likewise, Moïse Katumbi, current governor of Katanga, made large profits in the 1990s from a monopoly on importing maize meal from South Africa into neighbouring Zambia (Omasombo 2009). This was in large measure due to his political connections to the Chiluba administration in Zambia. Such exchanges between economic and political power are extremely common, we believe, and illustrate how the division between the *nouveaux riches* and the political elite is more nuanced than it might seem.

### *The Political Elite*

There is a long tradition in the DRC of elites migrating. This takes many forms and has many motivations. One of these is the prestige gained from installing oneself and/or one's family in wealthy countries. Residence abroad may also offer a springboard to membership in the elite. It can also act as a hedge against political instability, since those who fall from favour can sit out awkward periods in a base abroad.

Many who became important in the Kabila regime, mostly from Katanga province like Kabila himself, have connections with South Africa. This is leading gradually to the formation of a network of elite connections, a power base stretching between Gauteng and Katanga. Since the late Mobutu era and especially after the end of apartheid, a number of Congolese politicians have chosen to bring their assets to South Africa. It would be interesting to know much these people actually invest in South Africa. For many, South Africa just serves as an 'offshore' home for gains made in the

DRC. To be sure, large amounts are invested in physical assets such as property, especially in South Africa's luxury zones. The country is clearly a safe haven for some sections of the elite. It can also be a springboard to a political career in the DRC. South Africa has sometimes operated as a space for migrants to make contact with, and be integrated into, Congolese elites. This tendency for migration to play an important role in elite formation, already well-established under Mobutu, was boosted further by Kabila senior.

Although he was not consistent in this regard, Kabila seems to have considered that those who stayed in the DRC, especially residents of Kinshasa and the west, had 'collaborated' with the Mobutu regime. Studiously avoiding the opposition that had resisted Mobutu's rule since the 1980s, he recruited politicians from the diaspora as a guarantee that they had not been 'contaminated'. His son, Joseph Kabila, is a more pragmatic politician and, while a group of Katangese *grands* form the core of the DRC's power elite, an increasing number of ex-Mobutistes have also been welcomed into the upper echelons of government. For them a spell in the diaspora, notably in South Africa, has been functional for their political careers, allowing them to sit out periods of displeasure and retain certain assets, while time launders their political careers.

Since Kabila came to power, politicians with a South African connection have become a feature of the Congolese political landscape, with some prominent ministers regularly communicating in English, informally at least. The new English-speaking politicians were known locally as '*diazos*', a term applied more widely to politicians from the diaspora. These men –such as Augustin Katumba Mwanke, Barnabé Kikaya Bin Karubi and Bizima

Kahara – were appointed to the highest political functions. All of them spent significant periods in South Africa and were close aides of and collaborators with the Kabilas.

From 1991 to 1997 Augustin Katumba Mwanke worked in various South African corporations, successively Johannesburg Consolidated Investment (JCI), Bateman Minerals and Industrial Ltd, and HSBC Equator Bank of South Africa (as manager). Katumba's wife trained as a doctor in South Africa, where she befriended a fellow student, Bizima Kahara. He became an important figure in the AFDL (Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération) rebellion that ousted Mobutu (Bizima is a Banyamulenge, one of a group of Congolese Tutsi who formed an important contingent in the AFDL, which was then essentially a front for the Rwandan army) and the Kahara connection served Katumba well when Laurent Kabila took power in 1997. He became a counsellor to the Congolese finance minister. In 1998, he was appointed governor of Katanga, where he developed a close relationship with Joseph Kabila (Omasombo 2009: 117). When Joseph succeeded his father as head of state in 2001, Katumba took his chance, becoming one of the regime's most powerful men. Locally known as '*le tout puissant, le président du gouvernement parallèle*' ('the all-powerful chairman of the parallel government'), many observers cast him as Congo's Dick Cheney, the man directing policy while Joseph races trucks. Katumba Mwanke certainly had fingers in many pies – his name was cited by the United Nations (UN) Panel of Experts as part of an 'elite network' involved in the illegal exploitation of the DRC's mineral wealth (UN Panel of Experts 2001). In 2006 Katumba was elected Member of Parliament for Lubumbashi and, until his death in a

plane crash in 2013, collaborated closely with the President. He held substantial assets in South Africa and was said to be close to the ANC. Recent contracts for oil exploration in Lake Victoria were awarded to two companies registered in the British Virgin Islands in the name of Khulubuse Zuma, a nephew of the South African president, and Mark Hulley, lawyer to president Zuma (Wallace and Mundy 2010). This oil concession runs to billions of U.S. dollars; and, while it is hard to confirm, this kind of Congo/South African elite integration appears to be taking place more widely. Dan Gertler, an Israeli diamond dealer who has secured many important mineral contracts in the DRC, and was a close associate of Katumba Mwanke, appears to have used a certain Mark Willcox to move some of his money (Congo Leaks 2011). Willcox also works for Mvelaphanda holdings, an investment vehicle linked to the South African minister of planning Tokyo Sexwale (Brummer and Sole 2010). President Zuma was the first international figure to recognize the result of the 2011 DRC presidential elections, handing a comfortable victory to Kabila, despite the grave misgivings of the European Commission (2011) and the Carter Foundation (2011).

A South African connection has also helped several dignitaries of the Mobutu era to crawl back into the fold. Several of Mobutu's collaborators, who claimed asylum in South Africa in the late 1990s, have returned to the DRC thanks to connections made there. A notable example is Mbatshi Mbatsha, governor of Bas-Congo province after 2006. A native of the province, he had several important and profitable functions in the Mobutu era, including minister of works and director-general of Société Nationale des Chemins de

Fer du Zaïre (the Zairian railways). With the fall of Mobutu he claimed asylum in South Africa, establishing himself in Cape Town, where he gained a diploma in conflict resolution and management from the University of Cape Town (UCT). According to rumours, he was granted South African citizenship on account of his numerous business interests in the country. He returned to the DRC to take part in the elections of 2006, when the question of his nationality<sup>vii</sup> was just one controversy surrounding his election as Governor. Governors in the DRC are indirectly elected, that is to say that they are chosen by a vote of the regional legislature, a procedure that is notoriously open to corruption.

Mbatchi Mbatcha was elected governor despite the large opposition majority in the regional assembly and his membership of RCD-Goma (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie),<sup>viii</sup> a party in the government coalition that commanded little electoral support. Protests followed, amid plausible allegations of bribery, notably in quasi-millenarian demonstrations by a religious group, the Bundu Dia Kongo. The demonstrators were armed with kola nuts and sticks shaped like weapons – which they believed would turn into grenades and guns should the need arise. In their ‘response’ to these largely peaceful demonstrations, the Police Nationale Congolaise (or perhaps the army in police uniform) killed at least a hundred people, tortured survivors, looted property and desecrated places of worship (UN 2008).

As we have shown, the Congolese political elite have been able to use South Africa to bank gains made from rents. These are in turn guaranteed by violence. Almost all ruling classes rely, at some stage, on violent appropriation, but South Africa (alongside other destinations) is clearly

allowing Congolese elites to enjoy the rewards of lawlessness, while reducing what in other circumstances would be the concomitant risks. Insecurity has often spurred elites to move towards stability, if only to institutionalize gains made during an initial period of primitive accumulation. While the formation of intensive networks between the South African and Congolese political elites may be unsavoury, this alliance offers the prospect of a defence against Congo's smaller but much better-armed neighbours – above all Rwanda,<sup>x</sup> but also Angola<sup>x</sup> – and also against such behemoths as China and the United States, both of whom are showing a renewed interest in the Congo as mineral prices stabilize and the threat of a wider war recedes.

## **Conclusions**

We have argued that migrants provide an important element in the strategic relationship between South Africa and the DRC. South Africa is likewise a crucial space for relations between the DRC and its diaspora. While many studies focus on migrants towards the bottom of the social scale, we have presented a wider view, insisting that migration is of central importance for the middle classes and for those at the top also.

These patterns of migration are affected by the relationship between informality, money and power. Informality is often presented as a level of economic activity reserved for those at the bottom of the social scale (Hart 2010b) and many scholars (e.g. de Soto 1989) present the challenges posed by informality – e.g. lack of property title – as a reason why the poor remain poor. We agree that economic informality plays an important role in class

formation. But our study has also shown how all classes have an important relationship to economic informality. What is crucial is not whether classes are involved in the informal economy, but rather the terms on which they engage with that economy. Where those at the bottom are involved in 'forced informality' and are, as a result, compelled to take precarious and badly paid jobs, those in the middle are able to use informal economies to regularize their situation and to conduct profitable businesses, while retaining access to the advantages of formality – banking, credit, etc. Those at the very top, who have exploited a range of political rents in the extra-legal, informal space that is the DRC, can use South Africa to 'bank' these gains without much let or hindrance. These individuals may, if they choose, live out their time in South Africa as upstanding members of the community, entirely within the formal sphere. We believe that this analysis represents a useful corrective to the literature on migration and informality. Rather than assuming a priori that migrants have a positive or negative role to play, we need to look at empirical evidence. Likewise, the quasi-functionalist notion of a 'migrant community' is highly problematic. All social groups are marked by conflict and differences of interest, and migrants are no exception in this regard.

We believe that many of the restrictions placed on immigration by those in the bottom and middle categories are simply irrational, devalue the contributions of essentially honest people, and probably harm the South African economy. For those at the top, it seems natural and inevitable that South African elites should see their future interests as entwined with that of the Congo, and Congolese elites could do worse than to make a strategic alliance with the South African political class. But this relationship should

endeavour to move beyond the kind of extended primitive accumulation that it currently represents. The development economist Christopher Cramer (2006) has spoken of haemophilic societies – places where the violence wrought by primitive accumulation never properly coagulates into political and social stability. It seems to us that if the Congo and South Africa wish to move beyond this haemophilic condition, governments would do better to concentrate their efforts more on controlling flows of money (into tax havens) and less on controlling flows of people.

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<sup>i</sup> MacGaffey herself rejects the term informal economy for various reasons. We note that subsequent literature has not adopted her alternative usage, which seem to us very close, if not identical, to the notion of an informal economy.

<sup>ii</sup> The nationalization of the mines was successful in so far as they continued to operate productively into the 1990s, unlike most other sectors of the economy inherited at independence. The nationalization, which enshrined the independent management structure of the state mines, almost certainly protected it from the later handouts of 'Zairianization' undertaken in the 1970s, where foreign-owned property was simply given to well-connected individuals. The nationalization of the mines is often confused with Zairianization. Given that Zairianization happened several years later and was an unequivocal disaster, we suspect that this confusion has ideological underpinnings. Nationalization did not address the key issue of the downstream price that Zaire was getting for its Copper ores and the money paid over to central government by the nationalized mining sector was misappropriated. But

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misappropriation would have happened under a different ownership structure as well, indeed it would have been considerably worse. The later more personalized forms of redistribution – in plantation agriculture for example - tended to kill the goose; in the case of mining they simply stole the eggs.

<sup>iii</sup> It is uncertain how much this reflects the real state of the construction industry, in terms of the need for networks when winning contracts, or whether it just reflects Congolese attitudes towards White people.

<sup>iv</sup> Zadio is immortalized by J.B. Mpiana in the songs ‘Nungu Nungu’ and ‘Zadio Kongolo’ (see Trapido 2011).

<sup>v</sup> For the Congolese the term *colon* and *coloniser* have lost most connotations of colonial empire – a ‘*colon*’ is a ‘boss’.

<sup>vi</sup> The Luba of East Kasai were the beneficiaries of what Turner (2007) terms ‘differential modernization’ – having received greater access to mission education, they often went on to dominate the skilled professions in neighbouring Katanga. A more recent sub-text to the 1990s violence in Katanga was that natives of East Kasai were among the most implacable opponents of the Mobutu regime.

<sup>vii</sup> Officially the DRC does not allow dual nationality. This is something of a farce as most members of the current political class hold another passport along with one from the DRC.

<sup>viii</sup> Backed by Rwanda, this party at one time was a power broker in the DRC’s new dispensation. But a disastrous performance in the elections – where the Rwandan association did it no favours – left the party divided and weakened. It is not clear now whether the party is in opposition or government.

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<sup>ix</sup> South Africa has devoted significant troops to the UN effort to dislodge the Rwandan-backed M2F rebels in South Kivu. Rwanda's political elite has been financially dependent on mineral flows from Congo to maintain their lifestyle and fund the army. The UK has been the largest bilateral aid donor to the Rwandan regime for over a decade.

<sup>x</sup> There have been frontier skirmishes with Angola in recent years. At least one and probably two of Angola's most profitable oil-producing offshore blocks are almost certainly in Congolese territorial waters. The Angolan elite have made Jdark threats whenever the issue has been broached.