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Comments on Christianity, the Church and the State in the Kingdom of Kongo

Resumé

Le Congo ancien constitue un cas intéressant d'un état africain dont les élites politiques, à l'époque où les Portugais atteignirent la côte congolaise vers la fin du XV^{ème} siècle, étaient favorables à la conversion au christianisme. C'est donc un des rares exemples dans l'histoire de l'Afrique précoloniale. Le christianisme devint la religion de la majorité des élites politiques du Congo.

Grâce aux relations avec le continent européen une modernisation de l'appareil étatique congolais fut possible. Le christianisme influença et entraîna également d'importants changements dans le domaine de l'idéologie et de la religion, car il était un des plus importants facteurs renforçant l'esprit d'appartenance des habitants du Congo à leur état. Cet esprit d'appartenance devint en effet, et ceci peu après avoir noué les premières relations, un des éléments de l'idéologie du pouvoir. La destruction des centres de culte provinciaux, soutenue par le clergé, était censée affaiblir les tendances décentralisatrices au sein de l'état. La nouvelle religion, ainsi que toute la structure ecclésiastique l'accompagnant, rendit possible aux détenteurs du pouvoir la mise en place d'une idéologie du pouvoir commune à tout l'état.

Les prêtres jouaient également un rôle important dans la modernisation de l'appareil étatique. Ils dirigeaient des écoles où étaient formés les gens qui allaient exercer différentes fonctions dans l'appareil étatique. De même, grâce à la connaissance de l'écriture par ceux-là, la gestion de l'état devint plus efficace. Cette formation, qui comprenait certains éléments de l'éducation européenne, devint indice de la position politique.

Paradoxalement, le déclin progressif de l'appareil étatique du Congo, qui commença après l'année 1665, n'était pas dû à la pression européenne, comme ce fut le cas dans la plupart des états africains anciens, mais résultait d'un affaiblissement des relations avec l'Europe, ce qui diminuait les possibilités de transformations s'inspirant des expériences européennes, telle le renforcement de l'esprit d'appartenance à la communauté et à l'état.

The Kingdom of Kongo represents an interesting example study of an African state whose political elites openly accepted Christianity as far back as the end of the 15th century, just after the arrival of the Portuguese to the Kongolese coast. This event should be perceived as being one of just a handful of similar situations in pre-colonial Africa. Despite countless tensions or even conflicts which defined the relationship between Portugal and the Kongo, especially after 1575 and the creation of a Portuguese settler colony in Luanda – just across the southern Kongolese border – Christianity became the official religion of the majority of the ruling elites of the Kingdom of Kongo. It should be stressed that back in 1491 the ruler of the region, Nzinga a Nkuwu¹ († 1506), accepted Christianity of his own free will, as did the majority of the political class. At that moment, the Portuguese lacked the necessary military capacity to be able to impose their religion through forceful means. Simultaneously, they did not hold any such intentions. Naturally, occasional conflicts did arise. However, realistically speaking, the military threat posed by the Portuguese was never truly significant. That being said, the concurrent fall of the Kongo state was initiated by the lost battle of Ambuila against the Portuguese in 1665, in which António I (1660-1665) was killed, as well as many members of the ruling class. However, even then the Europeans had no intentions of conquering the country. The gradual decline of the state ensued mostly due to the internal strife. The Kongo, unlike the Angolan territories, was never a target for Portuguese territorial expansion.

As a consequence of adopting Christianity, the Kongo began to come under the influence of European civilization. At that time, the

¹ Upon his baptism, he claimed the Christian name João paying homage to the ruling king of Portugal at that time.

relationship with Europe was not only limited to religion, but also encompassed cultural, social and economic aspects. It also influenced the charter of the state and of the society. After the acceptance of Christianity, the Kongolese rulers were – at least in theory – treated as sovereigns with a standing equal to that of European monarchs. However, the Portuguese kings considered Kongo as being within their sphere of influence and attempted to limit its contacts with other European countries. The Portuguese monopoly in this regard was only broken for a short period of time during the 17th century. However, the Kongolese royal court managed to gain insight into the complexities of Europe and strived to come into contact with other European states, above all with the Holy See. Future relations with Rome became one of the key methods of legitimizing a monarch's rule. Garcia II even attempted to gain papal approval for transforming Kongo from an elective into a hereditary monarchy². This testifies not only to the significant authority which the Vatican had over local political elites, but also to the ruler's ability to adopt solutions which originated from the Iberian monarchies, and which could have prevented the customary fight for the throne following a ruler's death.

The fact itself that the white man had arrived to their coast came as a shock to the Kongolese. At least initially, they were perceived as strangers from another world, and items in their possession were regarded as possessing supernatural power³. Appropriating such artifacts from the Europeans increased the

² Giovanni Francesco da Roma aux cardinaux de la Propagande, São Salvador, Pinda, le 4 juillet 1651, in: L. Jadin, *L'ancien Congo et l'Angola 1639-1655. (D'après les archives romaines, portugaises, néerlandaises et espagnoles)*, Bruxelles-Rome 1975, doc. no. 732, p. 1333-1336 [henceforth ACA]; J. A. Cavazzi de Montecúccolo, *Descrição histórica dos três reinos do Congo, Matamba e Angola, Tradução, notas e índices pelo P. Graciano Maria de Leguzzano*, O.M.Cap., Lisboa 1965, V, §13-18, p. 9-12 [henceforth Cavazzi]; A. Hilton, *The Kingdom of Kongo*, Oxford 1985, p. 172f., 183.

³ W.G.L. Randles, *L'ancien royaume du Congo des origines à la fin du XIX^e siècle*, Paris 1968, p. 31.

prestige not only of the ruler, but also of the members of the elite who entered into contact with the outlanders.

However, the adoption of a new religion did not instantaneously result in the abandonment of traditional beliefs and customs. Henceforth, Kongolese history was often typified by varying degrees of tensions between the monarchs and the clergymen. Nonetheless, none of the rulers ever went as far as to consider an expulsion of the priests. On the contrary, the ruling class assisted them in destroying “false idols” and centers of local cult⁴. However, the rulers’ support was not derived solely from religious reasons. Shortly after first contact had been made with the Portuguese, Christianity itself became an essential part of the ideology of power. The destruction of provincial cult centers was effectively a method of weakening and curbing any decentralizing tendencies. The new religion together with the accompanying church structures gave the ruling class an opportunity to create a common ideology of power which encompassed the whole state.

Adopting the new religion resulted from a desire to acquire the achievements of the European civilization, with which the monarchy intended to strengthen its position. The Portuguese also supplied military assistance to the Kongolese rulers during conflicts with their neighbours, who were generally perceived by them as being pagans. As a result of the use of firearms, João was able to achieve initial success. The presence of white allies wielding unknown weapons within his ranks greatly enhanced his standing as a ruler throughout his own state.

However, enemies of Christianity were to be found even amongst the political elite of the country. The death of João, who *nota bene* apparently had returned to his previous beliefs on his

⁴ W. Bal (ed.), *Description du royaume de Congo et des contrées environantes par Filippo Pigafetta et Duarte Lopez (1591)*, Louvain-Paris 1963 p. 97 ; S. J. Mateus Cardoso, J. Castro Segovia, F. Botinck (eds.), *Etudes d'histoire africaine*, vol. 4: “Histoire du royaume du Congo (c. 1624), traduction annotée du Ms. 8080 de la Bibliothèque nationale de Lisbonne par François Bontinck, c.i.c.m en collaboration avec J. Castro Segovia”, Louvain-Paris 1972, p. 117, 120 [henceforth *HRC*].

death-bed, instigated an armed conflict between his sons. The battle for the throne was subsequently won by Afonso I (1506-1543), who managed to defeat his brother, an enemy of the new religion. This resounding victory gave rise to one of the most significant sources of legitimization for the rule of Afonso's descendants, who gained hereditary claim to the throne⁵. It was said to have been achieved by the miraculous intervention of Saint Jacob, who helped Afonso defeat his enemies. In reality, this victory was in large part due to the Portuguese support. Nonetheless, this military success became an important element of the dynastic tradition, which directly referred to this miraculous intervention by Saint Jacob and was re-enacted as part of the enthronement ceremony of the Kongolese rulers. Following this victory, a variety of new magical relics were presented to Afonso by the Portuguese king, including a crest commemorating the victory, as well as a banner and a mantle of the Military Order of Christ. They soon became part of the monarch's regalia, alongside the more traditional royal insignia such as a drum, hand pieces, and a figural whistle. In later periods, additional such pieces originating from Europe were added to the set and included: a papal bull received during the reign of Diogo I (1545-1561) and a crown sent by the Pope to Garcia II (1640-1661)⁶. All of these symbols had a discernible impact on shaping collective Kongolese consciousness.

In his work, B. Zientara points out the significance of

⁵ *HRC*, p. 120; Cavazzi, § 77, p. 222.

⁶ “Deuxième relation. Mort du roi du Congo, Alvaro III et élection de Dom Pedro, duc de Bamba, juin 1622”, in: L. Jadin, “Relation sur le Congo et l’Angola tirées des archives de la Compagnie de Jésus, 1621-1631”, *Bulletin de l’Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, fasc. XXXIX, 39, 1968, 333-454, here p. 370-388; *HRC*, 89, 121; *Giovanni Francesco Romano aux cardineaux de la Propagande*, Pinda, le 4 juillet 1651, in: *ACA* doc. no. 732, p. 1333-1336; *Giovanni Francesco da Roma aux cardineaux de la Propagande*, São Salvador, le 4 décembre 1651, in: *ACA*, doc. no. 762, p. 1374-1377; *Antonio da Montepadrone au secrétaire de la Propagande*, [après mars 1653], in: *ACA*, doc. no. 797, p. 1456-1465; T. Filesi, I. De Villapadierna, *La “Missio Antiqua” dei cappuccini nel Congo (1645-1835). Studio preliminare e guida delle fonti*, Roma 1978, p. 27; A. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

historical tradition and monarchic insignia in the development of a sense of community, which later laid the foundations for the formation of a national consciousness in Medieval Europe. Naturally, we cannot arbitrarily juxtapose processes which had occurred in Europe with those in Africa. Nonetheless in the case of the Kongo certain similarities can be observed. As can be noted, indigenous relics also played an important role within the state. However, with the passage of time the insignia of European origin gained in status and became more influential (at least until the beginning of the 18th century) in the formation of the collective consciousness of the Kongolesse nation⁷.

The adoption of Christianity cannot be solely analyzed in regards to the religious and ideological transformations which formed the nature of the Kongolesse state. Christianity not only strengthened the position of the monarch, but also introduced a variety of innovations. Accepting Christianity in the Kongo was justified as necessary in order to create a common ideology for the whole kingdom. This explained the ease with which Kongolesse rulers adopted the new faith and then propagated it. The substantial backing they offered clergymen, despite the numerous conflicts they had with them, were concurrent with the simple fact that, due to the increasing influence of priests, the importance of traditional provincial centers of worship – over which the ruler had no dominion – was significantly diminished. Hence, the monarchy was strictly connected with the Church and Christianity, even though the ruler through his actions not only often broke the moral principles of the faith, but also did not accept and understand its religious tenets in their entirety. Accordingly, the majority of the ruling elite both in the capital and in the provincial centers identified themselves as Christians. This mainly had a prestige-based justification. Christianity was naturally associated with Europe and its material culture. Apart from writing, this included attire and other items purchased from the Europeans. European accounts suggest that

⁷ B. Zientara, *Świt narodów europejskich. Powstanie świadomości narodowej na obszarze Europy pokarolińskiej*, Warszawa 1996, p. 330-332.

wealthy headmen dressed themselves in European clothes, while the common people were donned in traditional outfits. This led to the development of a sense of separateness, based on ties with Europe and Christianity. It also led to shaping a sense of adherence to a common state entity. This concept persevered during the period when the Kongo, as a single state entity, disintegrated and individual headmen *de facto* were not subordinate to the central rule.

Religious associations were created within the Kongo, which were based on European brotherhoods and secular knights' orders. These associations weakened the position of the Kongolese monarchs, while also limiting the power of headmen ruling on behalf of the crown. The establishment of religious brotherhoods, as well as the *Military Order of Christ (Militia Christi)*, did not result only from the power of persuasion held by the priests. This process was conducted in such a way that the institutions were acknowledged by the rulers and part of the political elite as being compliant with indigenous solutions, albeit essentially more powerful in standing. Through these associations, the rulers attempted to bind together the political elites of the country more closely. Membership, especially of the *Military Order of Christ*, potentially gave a sense of community enhanced by its sacral character, thus breaking its vows was supposed to bring misfortune to any person culpable of such a breach. However, even the fact that most of the elite belonged to the *Military Order of Christ* did not save the Kongo from power rivalry and variably successful attempts at overthrowing the rulers in the first half of the 17th century. Despite this, the order was active during the rule of Garcia, who wore a mantle with a cross as a symbol of his allegiance to the order, while supposedly many members of the Kongolese court belonged to the association⁸. However its conception was not however a parallel transfer of Portuguese

⁸ F. Bontinck (ed.), *Breve relation de la fondation de la mission des frères mineurs capucins du séraphique père Saint Francois au royaume de Congo, et des particularités, coutumes et façons de vivre des habitants de ce royaume écrite et dédiée aux éminentissimes seigneurs cardineaux de la Sacrée Congrégation de la Propagation de la foi par le père Jean-Francois de Rome (1648)*, Louvain-Paris: 1964, p. 104-105, 127.

institutions into an African setting, but more likely it was a European-influenced conversion of associations, which had previously existed in this part of Africa and had played a significant role in local political life.

From the point of view of the rulers the establishment of religious orders gave a unique opportunity to eliminate autonomous *kimpasi* and substitute them with a more centralized organization, over which one could strive to gain control with the help of the sympathetic clergymen. *Kimpasi* associations organized ceremonies in situations which constituted a grave threat to the given community, such as natural disasters or epidemics. The *kimpasi* rituals were performed to guarantee land fertility, but they were also perceived as constituting healing rites. As such, the *kimpasi* associations did not form centralized structures. However, it is surmised that its members had some sense of community⁹. The arrival of Capuchin friars, who introduced pastoral activity within areas outside the capital, gave Garcia an opportunity to restrict the role of *kimpasi* in the provinces and supplant them with brotherhoods led by monks. This was introduced in order to allow the provincial headmen to become independent of local conditionings. Through membership within the religious order they would simultaneously be granted high standing within the local community, since participating in the brotherhood gatherings was conceived as partaking in secret rituals, afforded only to a select few and guaranteeing them the protection of supernatural forces.

Clergymen were not limited purely to pastoral activities. Rulers used them as middlemen for contacts with Europeans and as mediators during any conflicts with headmen. They also functioned as representatives for the rulers during any interaction with Europeans. At times, they were also given the role of royal emissaries who were charged with disciplining provincial chiefs. This suggests the introduction of conscious policies by the rulers aimed at using priests as tools in counteracting decentralizing

⁹ J.K. Thornton, *The Kingdom of Kongo. Civil War and Transition 1641-1718*, Madison 1983, p. 61; A. Hilton, *op. cit.*, p. 26-28.

tendencies. This was only feasible if clergymen were perceived as people possessing significant authority, as well as powers deemed to be supernatural¹⁰.

Missionaries played an extremely important role in regards to the modernization of state machinery. The schools they maintained educated people, who then went on to hold various positions within state institutions. Through their knowledge of writing, state administration became much more efficient. Education, which comprised specific elements of European teaching, soon became a determinant for one's political standing. Most school students originated from the ruling class. Knowledge of writing was perceived not only as an acquired skill, but was also considered as possessing substantial power of a magical nature. For this reason both members of the dynasty as well as of the political elite would endeavour to ensure that their children received schooling. Consequently, Afonso I sent his son Henrique and the children of several dignitaries to Europe to gain a European education. His son was even ordained a bishop in 1518. In 1521, he returned to the Kongo, where soon after he unfortunately died, probably in the year 1526¹¹. Despite many attempts by rulers to create an indigenous Church, this never came to pass and subsequently no schools were created in the Kongo aimed at educating local clergymen. As a rule, such schools only functioned for very short periods of time, e. g. the Jesuit College established during the reign of Diogo I¹². Similarly, Afonso I encouraged Portuguese craftsmen to teach the Kongolese people their skills. Unfortunately, this plan was never brought into effect. His actions attest to the fact that due to his contact with Europe he had attempted to initiate transformations within the state and implement model European solutions, not only in the area of religion and ideology, but also in regards to state organization. Similar undertakings were also

¹⁰ *Relation de la revolte de Dom Afonso frère du roi du Congo Dom Alvaro III*, Congo, le 24 janvier 1622, in: L. Jadin, *Relation sur le Congo...*, p. 361-370; R. Piętek, *Garcia II-władca Konga a Kościół katolicki*, Warszawa 2009, p. 46-52.

¹¹ W.G.L. Randles, *op. cit.*, p. 101f., 151.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 105

attempted by the successors of Afonso I, however these only partially brought about the expected results. However, important are the aspirations of Kongolese monarchs to adopt European solutions. It was not until the reign of Garcia II and due to the presence of Capuchin friars that schools were erected in certain provinces, which allowed for the number of catechists to increase. They were acquainted not only with prayers, basic catechist fundamentals, but also possessed the ability to write. It is thanks to these catechists and their descendants that knowledge of writing survived. However, conflicts with Luanda and the future lack of interest from the Portuguese towards the Kongo substantially limited the capability of the state to emulate European norms.

Nonetheless, even in the 18th and 19th centuries, Kongolese rulers, who retained authentic control only over the capital and its immediate surroundings, attempted to rebuild their position with the help of European specialists and then aspired to educate their subjects based on the European model. In 1803, Garcia V (1802-1830) sent his nephew to Luanda in order to assure him an education there. He also endeavoured to send with him other people to learn various crafts. In response, the governor of Luanda suggested that it would be more beneficial to forward Garcia's V nephew as well as the remaining Kongolese to Lisbon, as Luanda lacked the qualified specialists needed to convey the required knowledge and skills. In 1809, the Kongolese ruler also had his son Pedro sent to Luanda for schooling. The monarch reiterated his request to assign specialists to the Kongo in 1813. That same year, Garcia V's son and nephew were referred to São Salvador, as the Carmelite convent was unable to guarantee them the necessary level of education. Garcia V once again sent his nephew to Luanda in 1818, where he was to finish studies in philosophy and theology. He stayed there until 1824, where he was eventually ordained. Up to 1836 he resided in São Salvador, acting as a chaplain in the cathedral. Afterwards, he set off for Luanda, as he became conflicted with Garcia V's successor, André II (1830-1842). In 1811, several years after the first such attempts by Garcia V, the chief of Bamba also initiated requests to the governor of Luanda to send him missionaries and craftsmen. The craftsmen were to

renovate the local church¹³. Presumably, they were also meant to share their skills with the inhabitants of that province.

Garcia V endeavoured to follow in the footsteps of Afonso I, as he also wanted to have a priest from his own dynasty operating in the Kongo. Nonetheless, Garcia V's situation was immensely more challenging, mainly due to the fact that during his reign there were no clergymen permanently residing in the Kongo, as had been the case during the times of Afonso I. The aspiration of Kongolese rulers to import specialists such as craftsmen or the attempts to help selected Kongolese acquire a trade strongly suggests that the leaders had attempted to adopt European norms. It can be observed as a permanent tendency which was present in the Kingdom of Kongo. Failures in this regard were partially a result of the limited potential of the Portuguese colony in Angola. This caused not only difficulties in educating indigenous craftsmen but also in the use of Portuguese specialists based in Angola, which were also in high demand in the colony itself.

An interesting development was that for many educated Kongolese it became more appealing to find suitable employment within the Portuguese colony than in the Kongo itself. This involved not only church institutions but also colonial administration. Apart from Garcia V's son, who chose a career as a priest in Angola, another example is the son of Henrique II (1842-1857/8), Nicolau, who in 1845 was sent by his father to Portugal to study at the University of Coimbra and upon his return to Africa in 1850 commenced studies in Luanda. Nicolau had initially planned a career within the church structures, but eventually decided to enter employment as part of the local administration. The governor of Luanda was presumably interested in keeping Nicolau within Portuguese territories. This was most likely aimed at guaranteeing a good relation between the governor and the Kongolese ruler. This

¹³ L. Jadin, "Les Missions du Congo à la fin du XVIII^e Siècle", in : *Congresso Internacional de História dos Descobrimentos. Actas*, vol. V, part 2, Lisboa 1961, 207-231 here, p. 228-230 ; L. Jadin, "Les survivances chrétiennes au Congo au XIX siècle", *Études d'histoire africaine*, 1970, 1, 137-185, here p. 145-149, 164.

also additionally allowed him to gain one of the trained civil servants, who were low in supply, not to mention that few spoke Portuguese as well as Kikongo he was additionally extremely knowledgeable in the realities of the Kongo. Thus, the son of the Kongolese ruler found employment in the Ambriz outpost¹⁴. Naturally, this was nothing more than an example of “brain drain” on a very limited scale. The Nicolau casus gives evidence that persons possessing European education sometimes chose the opportunity to further their careers in European administration instead of the power structures of the Kongolese state or even church institutions.

Due to the fact that Nicolau was the ruler’s son, it has often been presumed that he had no chance to assume the throne following his father’s death, as a dead monarch’s crown was succeeded by one of his nephews. In truth, the issue of succession was significantly more complex. In theory, the throne could have been taken over by any of the descendants of Afonso I, both from the male and female lineage. In Kongolese history, there have been cases of a son directly inheriting rule from his father. It can be envisaged that Nicolau’s decision was mostly influenced by the general appeal of work in European administration and not due to the lack of likelihood of succeeding his father on the throne after his death.

According to W.G.L. Randles, writing was deemed as a means of communicating with Europeans, as well as disseminating Christianity. However, it was never meant to enable the implementation of European-style bureaucracy. He substantiated that the ruling class feared the creation of an educated group, which could become a direct threat to their power¹⁵. However, despite Randles’s stance on the matter, it can be surmised that during the reign of Garcia the ability to read and write was held in high regard and

¹⁴ L. Jadin, *Les survivance chrétiennes...*, p. 170-174, 179; D. L. Wheeler, “Nineteenth-Century African Protest in Angola: Prince Nicolas of Kongo (?1830-1860)”, *African Historical Studies* 1, 2, 1968, 40-59; F. Bontinck, “Notes complément sur dom Nicolau Agua Rosada e Sardonía”, *African Historical Studies* 2, 1, 1969, 101-119; D. L. Wheeler, “Angola Is Whose House?” Early Stirrings of Angolan Nationalism and Protest. 1822 – 1910”, *African Historical Studies* 2, 1, 1969, 1-22.

¹⁵ W.G.L. Randles, *op. cit.*, p. 192f.

attempts were made to implement its use within the state administration. Randles referred to the fact that Garcia II withdrew students from schools once they gained the ability to read and write. This was supposedly brought about by the fear of the formation of an educated elite, which would pose a threat to his position. However, most likely the reason behind such actions was different, as there existed a strong need for people who could read and write within state administration and that is why they were retracted from the Capuchin-led schools immediately after acquiring this ability. This caused dissatisfaction amongst the monks, as the school governed by them in São Salvador was aimed at preparing catechists and candidates for their order, not specialists for state administration. In this case, the interests of the ruler and the monks were contradictory.

In turn, C. M. Santos has proved on the basis of the example of the Ndembu chieftainships, which were located between the Kongo and the Portuguese territories and which during the 17th century were a subject of rivalry between Luanda and São Salvador, that writing constituted an important means of communication not only between the chieftains and the governor of Luanda, but also between the Ndembu headmen themselves. Documents became not only a symbol of power, but the fact itself that they became acknowledged for their importance caused the formation of the foundations of a bureaucratic apparatus¹⁶. In the case of the Kongo, which consisted of a much larger court and whose leaders ruled over vast territories, where clergymen-led schools operated, albeit admittedly inconsistently, and where attempts were made to adopt European norms within the state, the significance of writing as a means for more efficient governance must have been even more appreciated.

Contacts with Europe, especially with Portugal, precipitated the emergence of Portuguese settlements in the Kongo, which in turn

¹⁶ C. M. Santos, “Escrever o Poder: Os Autos de Vassalagem e a Vulgarização da Escrita entre as Elites Africanas Ndembu”, in: B. Heintze, A. von Oppen (eds.), *Angola on the Move. Transport Routes, Communications and History. Angola em Movimento. Vias de Transporte, Comunicação e História*, Frankfurt am Main 2008, 173-181.

resulted in the creation of a mulatto community. As mostly men used to come to Africa, they tended to take indigenous women as their life partners. It is from among these mulattoes that local clergymen were recruited for both the Kongo and Angola. The lifestyle led by mulatto canon priests roused up indignation of clergymen arriving from Europe. Many of them openly held concubines. Due to the fact that the bishops presided in Luanda, the canons had a considerable degree of autonomy. The main problematic issue with mulattoes was that they functioned on the verge of two cultures. In most cases, they deemed themselves to be Portuguese, but on the other hand, due to their mothers' influence they were substantially immersed in the local culture. Especially until 1622, many Portuguese settled in the Bamba province in the Kongo, which bordered with the Portuguese territories to the south, and established their plantations in that area. As a result of this, a new society was beginning arise with a cultural congeniality with the São Salvador canons, knowledgeable in reading and writing, possessing both European and African trading affinities and keeping trade connections with both the African interior and the Portuguese colonies in Africa and in Brazil. This group could have become a factor influencing the formation of a new community possessing both European and African characteristics. Its existence could have instigated the modernization of the economy and social change in the Kongo. Unfortunately, the Portuguese-Kongolese conflict of 1622 caused Kongo to be abandoned by most Portuguese and those among the mulattoes who considered themselves Portuguese¹⁷. The lack of control over chapter members by the ordinary and limited contact with the outside world in the second half of the 17th century caused the canon priests to become further immersed in local society, while their lifestyle as well as their religious behavior began to diverge from the Catholic tenets of faith. Feasibly, this probably allowed them to become more widely accepted by the local communities. On the other hand, however, they ceased to be a factor influencing cultural and social change in the

¹⁷ L. Jadin, *Relation sur le Congo...*, p. 338-345.

Kongo, especially when during the following century there were practically no deacons permanently residing in the area.

Missionary activity, especially in the 17th century, had an immense effect on the ordinary inhabitants of the Kongo. They were perceived as people endowed with supernatural abilities and in all effect operating on behalf of the monarchy. The clergy's teachings influenced the shaping of a new vision of the world, in which Christian elements coexisted with indigenous ones. Understandably, the clergy were unable to eliminate traditional beliefs and customs. However, certain elements of the priests' teachings became an inherent part of the local culture and in time they contributed to forming a sense of community among the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Kongo. When towards the end of the 17th century an armed conflict between rivals for the throne was taking place, many of them opted for the need to reconstitute the old state. During that period, an Antonian movement, consisting of many citizens of the state, was spreading. Its existence can point to the formation of a certain degree of collective consciousness. It is important to note that the movement, albeit focused against both medicine men and European priests, incorporated many elements borrowed from the Capuchin teachings, including the cult of Saint Anthony of Padua. The leader of the movement, Kimpa Vita-Beatriz, believed that she was possessed by Saint Anthony himself. During her teachings she explained that Christ had been born in Bethlehem, which was located in São Salvador. Christ, the Virgin Mary and Saint Francis were supposed to have been black Kongolese. It is poignant to point out that this movement involved a large amount of Kongolese citizens and its substantial aim was to reinstate a strong Kongolese statehood. The movement was eventually suppressed and Kimpa Vita was burned at the stake in 1706 in the presence of the Capuchin monks¹⁸. The Kongolese ruler of that time, Pedro IV (1703-1718), had

¹⁸ Bernardo da Gallo, in: L. Jadin, "Le Congo et la secte des Antoniens. Restaurations du Royaume sous Pedro IV et la "Saint Antoine" congolaise (1694-1718)", *Bulletin de l'Institut Historique Belge de Rome*, fasc. XXXIII, Bruxelles-Rome 1961, p. 492, 532; W. G. L. Randles, *op.cit.*, p. 157ff.

beforehand come to the conclusion that she posed a significant threat to his position, which, come what may, hinged on Christianity and not on heresy. Nonetheless, the example of the Antonian movement shows the apparent process of the formation of an ethnic consciousness among the Kongolese people, which had an affinity with both the existing state institutions and Christianity, even though essentially it was directed against priests and many pillars of faith, as Kimpa Vita and her followers believed that the clergymen had purposefully distorted the message of the Gospel¹⁹.

The Kongo remains an interesting case study of an African pre-colonial state, which through contacts with Europe undertook the modernization of state institutions and underwent significant transformations in its ideology and religion under the influence of Christianity. Christianity was only one of the key factors influencing the strengthening of the national affinity of the Kongolese people.

Paradoxically, the future disintegration of state institutions in the Kongo was not influenced by European pressure, as was the case in most pre-colonial African states, but was caused by the diminishing contacts with Europe, which restricted the capacity for further transformation using European solutions, including the continuing formation of a collective consciousness of belonging to the community and the state.

¹⁹ The Antonian movement and Kimpa Vita were described by J. Thornton in the paper *The Kongolese Saint Anthony. Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Anthonian Movement, 1684-1706*, Cambridge 1998. In Polish literature, this issue was discussed by G. Kaczyński, who pointed out that the leader of the Antonian movement is currently perceived by part of the modern African elite as being a patron of Congolese national identity. Kaczyński G., *Czarny chrystianizm. Ze studiów nad ruchami afrochrześcijańskimi*, Warszawa 1994, p. 104ff.; Kaczyński G., „The Predecessors of Afro-Christianity. (Reading the Chronicles of the Old Congo Kingdom)”, *Hemispheres. Studies on Cultures and Societies* 7, 1992, 25-42.