"Masterless Men"

Riots, Patronage, and the Politics of the Surplus Population in Kinshasa

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On the basis of fieldwork in Kinshasa, this essay makes a link between riots, the recent anthropology of "surplus populations," and distributive politics in low-income countries, especially Africa. Tracing the history of a political demonstration turned riot, it shows how distribution structures the interactions between rich and poor in the city. Situating the riot in a context in which subjects are dependent on the market for goods but are not able to sell their labor, the essay shows the riot to be a rational intervention in a place where elites do not see popular support as especially important and where occupying space and controlling circulation and distribution are the primary political-economic imperatives.

Night in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It is 2011, in the run-up to elections. Sitting in a bar beneath trees, I hear a murmur, then a roar, then an angry crowd surging along the road beyond, then gunfire. The crowd, in response, runs back along the route it came as a hand pulls me from behind back into the building. The crowd has come from down the road in Ebende—a township built by the Belgians to house industrial workers.[1] Like many of Kinshasa's outlying areas, Ebende is now associated with poverty and violence. The crowd was trying to get to Malolé, which is even poorer. Ebende boasts the remnants of formal infrastructure, while Malolé has mud roads and an electricity supply even worse than in the rest of this giant city, where many are without power for months on end. The crowd of *bana Ebende* (literally "children of Ebende," here referring to the inhabitants of an area) is trying to get to (and destroy) the house of Likala, a one-time judo champion who, since 2010, has been a prominent member of the youth league of the Partie du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie (PPRD), the main ruling party behind (now former) President Joseph Kabila.

Earlier that day, Likala had played a prominent role in a small demonstration where a number of young men had accompanied Desiré, a proregime candidate, to make gifts to a supportive church in Ebende. These demonstrators had been paid US$25 each to attend the rally. This was part of a general pattern in which regime figures pay poor young men—known as *sportifs* because they practice martial arts such as judo and boxing—to support their demonstrations and to intimidate and attack rivals. Centered on an electoral district, here called Calvare, this paper is about a paid-for demonstration and a subsequent riot during election time and, in a wider sense, about distributive politics in very large, very poor cities.

1. The names of places have been changed, and landmarks have been disguised. All of the central protagonists' names have been changed.

"Distributive" here refers to the handing out of money or resources when distribution is based on ideas of obligation or membership and not conceptualized as compensation for labor (Englund 2015; Ferguson 2015). Distributive politics is strongly associated with rents on primary commodities and is important in the DRC. Since its revival in the early 2000s, an industrial mining sector, foreign owned and managed by expatriates, has been, in financial terms, the largest part of the economy. Though the deals signed are notoriously bad for the country as a whole (see Lutundula Commission 2006), this sector pays a series of rents, official and unofficial, accruing to whomever is recognized as sovereign. In the DRC, this recognition has nearly always been accorded to whoever is in power in Kinshasa, however weak their control of the hinterland. Those controlling the capital have attracted a raft of other payments and protection monies, in diamonds, timber, and so on, along with a series of further rents related especially to property ownership and construction. Thus, the primary political imperatives in the DRC have been around controlling the capital and negotiating access to the distribution of rents within a relatively small social circle, reflected in the need to make "connections" and in a Lilliputian obsession with the rituals of daily life in the capital.

Dependence, Distribution, and the "Relative Surplus Population"

Recent scholarship has argued that narratives of development are invariably based on a false premise: that those dispossessed by "modernization" will be drawn into the social fold through industrialization and a resultant expansion of wage labor (Denning 2010; Ferguson 2015; Li 2010, 2017). Evidence suggests that this story is no longer true. In most parts of the developing world, wage labor has been declining, either absolutely or as a percentage of the population, even during periods of GDP growth, and deindustrialization now begins long before much of the

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population is pulled out of poverty (*Endnotes* 2010; Rodrik 2016), leaving in its wake an ever larger "relative surplus population" (Marx 1961 [1867]:906). These are people who are surplus relative to capital's capacity to exploit them for profit, populations without access to wage labor yet dependent on the market for basic provisioning.

Anthropologists have proposed that these changes necessitate a political shift away from liberal personhood centered around self-ownership and labor, where struggle is based in the site of production, and toward the politics of distribution based in the "relational person" (Ferguson 2015; Li 2010). In Africa and elsewhere, ideas of rights in distribution have often been expressed in terms of dependent kinship or relative age (something an earlier literature termed "paternalism"), and recent scholarship has argued that the deployment of such vocabularies in contemporary Africa does not necessarily represent a regressive political program (Englund 2015; Ferguson 2015). In addition, this paper shows that, notwithstanding the appeals to vocabularies of relatedness, the claims encoded in such professions of dependence can be very conflictual and build on previous histories of struggle (Li 2017).

In understanding the events described in this paper, I also make a link to a second literature that has placed to the fore the claims made by the social category of "youth." Youth here refers "less to a specific age cohort . . . than to a set of precarious circumstances" (Watts 2018:479). The political expressions of the "precarious youth" discussed here are often made in the vocabulary of relative age and dependent kinship mentioned above—supplicants present themselves as "juniors" or "children"—but this is in a context of conflict that everyone understands. It has been a much-debated issue in Africanist anthropology whether youth in this sense constitutes a "class" (Dupré and Rey1969; Richards 1996). While this paper does not intervene directly, it is assumed that the youth identities discussed here do, at least partially, cohere around the grievances of the surplus population. While objectively the surplus population is composed of a broad range of social ages and types, ideologically, it is young "masterless men" denied possibilities for social reproduction and "alienated from the worlds of legitimate authority, and from the market order" (Watts 2018:480; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 2004; Gore and Pratten 2003; Honwana 2012) who often come to represent the "dangerous class" in the popular imagination.

In Kinshasa, these masterless men are connected to a large repertoire of popular practices that are also important class signifiers. Strong neighborhood identities, drug use (especially marijuana), types of music, football, forms of martial sport such as boxing and judo, bodybuilding, fighting, and violent male heroes from popular culture are all strongly associated with poor young men. Nowadays kung fu films and video games are popular, while at independence such men were keen followers of Westerns and often dressed as cowboys, becoming known as "bills" (as in Buffalo Bill). To this day *yanké* (from Yankee) means "tough," while the subdialect of Lingala spoken by poor young men is still known as *hindou-bill* (De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Gondola 2016; Pype 2007).[2]

Some, for example, Cole (2011), have argued that youth should not automatically be seen as an oppositional category: African youth movements are "not . . . standing outside existing structures of power: . . . [but] trying to get inside them" (72). This is a useful corrective to the tendency to approach all youth culture under the sign of "resistance," but, as Cole acknowledges, we need to pay attention to class dynamics (see Pype 2007). The famous Congolese *sapeurs* foregrounded by Cole in her discussion of "youth integration" came from a decayed bourgeoisie (Gandoulou 1989), and their attempts to "crash" the social system, desperate as they appear, depended on resources that youths from the surplus population did not have. As this paper shows, for those nearer the bottom of the social scale, patronage-seeking behavior is generally poorly understood as "trying to get inside" the social order.

The Riot as Political Form

The riot is salient to these questions of youth, surplus populations, and distribution, and the following discussion draws on classic literature about riots from social history and on Joshua Clover's (2016) recent reinterpretation of this literature. Edward P. Thompson's (1971) account of the eighteenth-century bread riot situates it as a struggle by a population that was increasingly dependent on the market for food but was not (yet) selling its labor. Because of this, conflict concentrated not at points of production but at points of circulation and distribution (in this case, grain depots, markets, ports, bakeries, etc.), with the riot as a popular veto on "profiteering" by landowners, bakers, and flour merchants in times of scarcity. Clover (2016), drawing on Tilly (2008), shows how a shift from the riot to the strike occurs in repertoires of protest over the nineteenth century—corresponding with a shift in the site of conflict from the point of distribution and circulation to points of production like the factory floor. Changes in the structure of global production often characterized as "neoliberal" mean that both rent and nonemployment are more important than they once were in high-GDP countries (Frase 2011; Neveling 2018). Clover (2016) suggests that this has led to a resurgence of riot-type disruptions in the high-GDP world. In any case, in places like the DRC, where wage labor has always been a relatively obscure subcategory of work, where precarity has always been the norm (Millar 2014), and where ruling-class income has always been based on rents, riot-type disturbances have always been to the fore.

Riots led by poor young men have had marked political significance in Kinshasa. Independence itself came about because of riots in 1959. Football supporters emerging from a game that their team had lost unexpectedly collided with police in the process of dispersing a political demonstration. The

2. The *hindou* probably relates playfully to the idea that "Indians" were the enemies of bills and cowboys.

ensuing disorder lasted for days and destroyed the air of implacable command that the colonial state had cultivated over decades. The panic this generated within the colonial administration precipitated Belgium's botched decolonization the following year. Likewise, in the early 1990s, when opposition to Mobutu's Western-backed dictatorship grew, bouts of prolonged citywide looting, known as *les pillages*, marked a point of no return for the regime (Devisch 1998). More recently, as will be discussed at the end of this essay, a series of demonstrations turned riots pushed now ex-president Joseph Kabila into a partial retreat, confounding his preferred schemes for retaining power.

Riots are not the only form of political action in Kinshasa. From the 1980s, a series of opposition politicians, above all Etienne Tshisekedi, until his death in 2018 leader of the Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social (UDPS), have commanded mass support. This opposition has generally diverted popular energies into other forms of action. Unlike the smaller demonstrations discussed in much of this paper, these are unpaid events. Notable in this register have been mass demonstrations that stress Christian forbearance and mass stay aways, known as *villes mortes*. Courageous and impressive as these events are, I argue that the formal opposition has been limited in its effectiveness and that these limitations relate to the social and intellectual biases of the opposition leadership, which comes from Kinshasa's narrow class of professional bourgeois, with lawyers, clergymen, and former Mobutiste deputies to the fore. Viewing their popular support as a source of legitimacy but never as a way to seize power, they have repeatedly channeled popular discontent into pseudolegalistic frameworks in a state where the rule of law counts for nothing.

Demonstrations in this register are about voice—expressing the popular will—where for the masses they are about presence, controlling space and using bodies to occupy (and, if possible, seize) nodes of power and circulation. This was evident after the first of the aforementioned 1990s *pillages*, when Mobutu played a series of political games appointing and dismissing members of the opposition. At one point, a huge crowd from some of Kinshasa's poorest districts arrived at Tshisekedi's house in Limete, imploring him to march with them to the *primature* and take power from Mobutu's appointed prime minister (see Trapido 2016:65). Tshisekedi simply told them to go home. In this context, the mass marches and *villes mortes*, hardly effective at the best of times, have gradually lost force. Like the Grand Old Duke of York, the opposition has repeatedly marched its supporters to the top of the hill, only to march them down again. This is not to romanticize riots: undirected by popular leadership, they struggle to articulate a coherent program, frequently express xenophobic sentiments, and often have deleterious consequences for the masses themselves. But in their stress on a politics of presence—controlling circulation and space—they have understood something crucial about the political economy.

In theorizing riots, a useful heuristic can be gained from juxtaposing a set of contrasts: between the surplus population and the proletariat, between the riot and the strike (see also Clover 2016), between distribution and the wage form (though, as we will see below, the surplus population does not in fact benefit from distribution), and between relational conceptions of the person and liberal "autonomy." One further contrast is between time and space. Edward P. Thompson (1967) argued that an industrial time consciousness linked to the need for homogeneous units of value produced at a regular rate emerged in the nineteenth century and that this time consciousness replaced the highly differentiated social perception of time in the prefactory era. This need to set productivity within the delineated grid of industrial time became the terrain of conflict for labor. Disrupting this even time, slowing or stopping its flow, became the target of collective protest. Filip De Boeck (2015) argues that for the poor in contemporary Kinshasa, time is radically different from the uniform rhythm of industrial work time. Time here is highly syncopated, with each individual struggling body inserting and detaching itself from networks of survival according to a series of complex polyrhythms. It is clear that this syncopated, wage labor–free environment renders the time and production axis an unpromising focus for collective struggles. Thus, just as classic ethnographies of the industrial workplace (e.g., Lee 1998:109–136) show that conflict is a series of microstruggles over control of the worker's time, so this paper proposes—and documents—a political ethnography of the relative surplus population as a series of microstruggles over the circulation of plebeian bodies in space.

Where the body is an important form of infrastructure (De Boeck and Plissart 2004:235–236; Simone 2004), configurations of the plebeian body in space (noticeable not just in riots but also in other public events such as funerals) have the capacity to disrupt and reenvision the flows of the city in multiple ways. These struggles, often concentrated in placing bodies at key passing points in social geography, become critically concerned with presence. Vasudevan (2015) has called this a "radical politics of infrastructure" that sometimes "*materializes* the social order which it seeks to enact" (318), while at other times it asserts "the persistence of the body" materializing against the powerful (Butler in Vasuduvan 2015:323). In the context of Kinshasa, Geenen (2009) has shown how *shegues* (street children) have sought to "colonize" spaces within the city, asserting their presence and perhaps a "right to the city" (Lefebvre 1996 [1967]) in the face of extreme official violence.

This notion of presence situates political contest in a space that is recognizably public. And Kinois representations of space make characteristically liberal and modern divisions between public and private: the "house" (*ndako*) and the "outside" (*libanda*), where—unlike in the ancient world—it is the outside and the public that are conceptualized as the site of both economic production and sociality (Arendt 1958).[3] But, while we

3. Going further still, Simone (2010) discusses Kinshasa's "public" and that of other low-GDP cities in classically liberal fashion. Contrasting the public with the corrupt private uses of resources by municipal authorities, the public is found in a form of speech that goes beyond the specificities of

should recognize the distinctively modern outlines of political space in Kinshasa, Western understandings of politics do contain assumptions that we need to set aside. Examples include the assumption that political equality can (and should) exist in the absence of economic equality (see Staeheli and Mitchell 2008) or that politics is essentially about speech and communication, rather than, say, occupation of space or distribution (see also Meiksins-Wood 1995; Vasudevan 2015). As we will see, these assumptions are fundamentally at odds with the political conceptions of Kinshasa's poor majority.

Another of these assumptions, derived from modern European political theory but common in anthropology (Radcliffe-Brown 1940:xiv; Sahlins 2017 [1972]:134–167), is that politics is based in some form of underlying "contract" between "rulers" and "the people" (for critiques, see Gledhill 2000:10–11). Despite great differences, contemporary Africanist political theory shares with classic social contract theory the idea that there is a long-term bargain between leaders and followers. Distribution is central to this bargain, with African politics supposedly characterized by "vertical" (from high to low rather than class based) forms of resource distribution and political allegiance. One strand within this thinking links distribution to legitimacy: the leader as "good giver" creates both material incentives and a system of ideas (Bayart 1993; Bratton and Van de Walle 1994). In all versions of this story, the bargain is pathological because vertical distribution dissipates accumulation, glorifies "corruption," and prevents the formation of a Weberian bureaucracy (Bayart 1993; Chabal and Daloz 1999; de Sardan 1999). Recent Africanist anthropology has both endorsed and nuanced this picture, pointing to the ambiguities of patrimonialism: showing how the demos can both critique and legitimate practices of patronage or corruption, relying on brokers while decrying or satirizing the moral malaise (de Sardan 1999; Smith 2006).

Yet valuable as they are in the details, such stories paint a misleading portrait of African political economy. Massive capital flight relative to GDP—higher in Africa than in other continents (Collier, Hoeffler, and Pattillo 2001)—is incompatible with the notion that elite pillage is linked to exceptional pressures to redistribute vertically. Money stashed in the Virgin Islands has, by definition, resisted the pull of local retinues (Trapido 2015). This essay complements this macroperspective, demonstrating ethnographically that the focus on the bargain secured via vertical distribution is misplaced.

This is not to deny the importance of either resources or ideas in politics. As elsewhere in the world, resources and distribution are inseparable from ideological affiliation. But looking closely at different kinds of political payment actually undertaken, we see clear categorical differences. That is to say, we see differences between horizontal payments to class equals and vertical payments to social inferiors. As I will show, continuing to "rule" in Kinshasa depends not on striking a bargain with the demos but on pleasing other powerful people, and the overwhelming majority of distributions are directed either horizontally or upward to other power brokers. The tiny sums paid to poor people to stage demonstrations buy no wider support; indeed, they probably alienate a hostile populace further, and even those who take part are rarely won over. An important question for this essay, therefore, is, what is everyone doing? Why do the ruling classes pay the poor to participate when they are not prepared to invest enough to win real popular support? Why do the poor turn up for politicians whom they mostly despise? How do the riot and the paid-for demonstration overlap? I suggest that it is in the politics of presence and in struggles over space and circulation that we should start to look for the answer.

In what follows, I will attempt to answer these questions, laying out the complex social context in which this politics operates. First, I will examine the ways in which distribution relates to class power and how plebeian demands for patronage actually represent a critique of existing elites. From there, I will look at how this class-based political landscape interacts with paid-for demonstrations. Having established this background, I return to the story of Likala, Desiré, and the riot in Ebende with which I opened this essay. Exploring this particular incident in depth—looking closely at the intersection of rumors, money, personal advancement, class struggle, and space—allows us to reach a better understanding of what is really at stake in this kind of politics. Finally, I apply this new understanding to the recent 2018 elections in Kinshasa, looking at the ways the notion of presence allows us to make sense of the apparently confusing events we find there.

Distribution and Class Power

The minister is blind drunk, having finished the best part of a bottle of Chivas Regal. The social event underway has brought together many politicians in the government and businessmen, and the entertainments are lavish. Still clasping the bottle, the minister's arm is around the neck of an expatriate businessman heavily involved in logging and diamonds. "Just remember it's me who protects you! Nobody can do anything to you!" The reference, immediately understood by all present, is to protection monies paid by the businessman to the minister in exchange for the smooth running of the business. These kinds of arrangements are common and reflect the nature of ruling-class incomes. Based in informal rents on commodities, they demonstrate the uncertainty of economic activity in the DRC. While expatriate businesses are especially vulnerable, nobody is immune. There is much "cutting in" of other powerful people in order that they will provide a network of protection against frequent political reversals. The hyperdiverse business portfolios of those at the top result from these constant offers of shared enterprise (Congo Research Group 2017). One example concerns Justin Mibeko, a minister who will recur in our story. Reported in the international press as having stolen money from the sale of international debts owed to a Congolese

community in a way to make unspecified others feel that they are being addressed in ways they might feel part of (120).

parastatal (to a fund in a tax haven), Mibeko's case received unusual scrutiny, and he resigned. But there was no prosecution or return of money. It is alleged that Mibeko gave a generous share to others in the inner sanctum, ensuring that his fall from grace was short-lived. These significant flows of resources within the ruling class happen largely in secret: the expression "the kola nut hello" (*mbote ya likasu*), referencing the common gesture of sharing kola in a closed handshake, evokes such transactions.

As this shows, the ruling class in Kinshasa is a community of distribution, and the limits of the class are the limits of the community over which meaningful largesse is disbursed. It also shows how the ruling class is unstable, with competition between individuals and factions conditioning patterns of distribution. While it is sometimes thought that factional politics is opposed to class identification (e.g., Scott 1972), this is not the case here. The dangers of intraelite factional intrigue mean that aspirant patricians are constantly obliged to win powerful allies to protect themselves from the threat of political reversal. This is done by making prestations and otherwise distributing gains within the ruling class, an imperative that also mitigates strongly against significant vertical distribution for reasons that the following example explains.

Aimé: The True Boss Goes to Jail

Aimé's father worked for an international company in the 1970s. Aimé traveled abroad in the 1990s and gained status via a series of cultural interventions. Trading on this, he insinuated himself into patrician circles via gift exchange. Playing Falstaff to the inner circle, he gave them designer clothes and introduced them to nightlife. Becoming a member of the PPRD, he was elected to Parliament. A particularity of Aimé's situation was that his father had built a house in a then–sparsely populated area that with time became colonized by the poor, and Aimé grew up with poor neighbors with whom he seems to have felt a genuine moral community. After his election, Aimé became the man who built bridges for his flood-prone constituents and helped with medical and funeral expenses, acquiring a cult following among the poor. None of this came cheap, however, and Aimé had not worked his elite connections sufficiently well to keep paying for everything. He then used his position in other ways. When a nearby factory appeared to be leaking noxious chemicals, Aimé arrived, demanding "compensation" from its Lebanese owner. Unfortunately for Aimé, the factory owner had a good connection to a regime figure whom he called and who dispatched soldiers. Locked in the factory and realizing his mistake, Aimé tried to soften the blow, telephoning contacts of his own, but this was only partly successful, and Aimé was suspended from the party for a year, triggering events that would eventually lead to dissident status, exile, and imprisonment. On the surface, this story fits the "conventional view": the patron misappropriating funds to become popular with an extended plebeian social network and distribution as the opposite of "good governance."

Digging deeper, it illustrates why such behavior is necessarily unusual. By raiding the factory, Aimé, a relatively marginal figure, came into conflict with others in the ruling class. Successful patricians often extort or pillage when opportunities present themselves. But this misses the point: Aimé's crime was not extortion but a lack of class solidarity; had Aimé spent less of his money on paupers' funerals and more on distribution within his class, he might have been a less marginal figure, and his small-time acts of extortion would have been set against denser networks of ruling-class friendships to protect him. For the poor, figures like Aimé do not bind them to a corrupt political system but embody their critique of it; vertical resource dispersal and the "good leaders" who enact it are subaltern ideals, not mainstream political practice. Furthermore, Aimé's popularity with the poor was not the product of naked instrumentalism. Generosity is, rather, proof of a leader who eschews a transactional approach to retinues. Here the phrase "he gives without looking" (*apesa atala te*), that is, without calculating, is a term of political acclaim.[4]

But if all this is the case, then why do ruling classes spend any money on the masses? Why not ignore them? The answer is complex and questions liberal assumptions about politics as the legitimacy of rulers with the masses (Holbraad 2014). First, though, we must examine typical forms of political expenditure, drawing on ethnographic materials from the 2006 and 2011 elections.

Paying the Populace

While it is rejected by two parties (the UDPS and the Parti Lumumbiste Unifié), distributing money is a necessary part of most rallies in Kinshasa, and organizers attempt to make lists of those coming in advance. This is to keep some handle on the anarchy that often ensues and also to stop staff from pocketing too much of the campaign's funds. The major reason for a list, however, is that running out of money can be physically dangerous. "If you don't pay, you risk being lynched," one not especially unpopular congressman told me. At times, especially during the first election in 2006, this ludic insincerity of the masses reached epic proportions. One informant recounted how a candidate wanted a "base" in his part of the city. The informant was instructed to bring people to a meeting.

> I came with around 30 people. . . . "Honorable" didn't have any discourse to convince people. "Honorable" comes, takes the microphone—"*Nye nye!*" and the audience responds "*Nyeeee!*" [a mocking rendition of the sub-Mobutu call-and-response style of political rallies in the DRC]. . . . "*Bana* . . . you know me!" People say, "Yes Honorable! *Aa vieux!*" And he says, "I don't have a lot to tell you, I've got a lot of money you can see. . . . Here is money, if you vote for me I will give

4. As I have argued elsewhere (Trapido 2015), this is in fact a cogent critique: the more elites are forced to redistribute, the less they have to put in tax havens.

> you money!" People clapped, "Hwaaaaaaa!" And then he adds, "The speech is over. People with money don't talk too much!" [And to his aides:] "Go give them the money." After that the fight started and no joke, Joe, I can tell you, we all came back for money more than once. (interview, 2014)

Similar practices structure the kinds of crowd that led to the riot. It is 2011, two days before the riot. Music blares, marijuana wafts, and crowds besiege the entrance to the headquarters of the candidate for reelection, Joseph Kalombo. Why the scrum? Campaign T-shirts (*polo*) are being distributed, and there are not enough. Does this indicate the crowd's ardor for Kalombo? Unlikely. I ask a young man whether he is going to vote for him.

"Me? No! I'm just waiting for the money, then I'm going home."

Home for this man and most of the crowd is a poor neighborhood typical of the areas that supply people at demonstrations. As the sun sets, the demo degenerates into a series of fights. This is the most common (but least serious) form of political disorder in Kinshasa. Fights are not between rival political formations but within a series of "cells" of which the crowd is composed. Crowds are not an amorphous mass or simply a group of individuals but a series of loose units sometimes referred to as stables (*écuries*). While the *écuries* assembled for rallies are often transient, they do relate to a series of gerontocratic, quasi-familial idioms that abound in the city, specifically the relationship of the junior (*petit*) and elder (*vieux*). To recognize oneself as someone's junior (*petit na*, literally "small of"; it also implies some kind of fraternal connection) is to declare a mildly gerontocratic relationship where a petit will perform tasks for and receive spiritual and material blessing from his vieux.[5]

Fixers organizing rallies link to these stables via a single intermediary, often conceptualized as the vieux. In this case, the stables are dojos and boxing clubs, this crowd having been recruited from the sportifs. It is understood that at the end of the demo there will be an envelope for each dojo head that will then be shared with the other members. Such envelopes should not contain much less than US$5 for each participant (money known as *tshweke*), but they have a tendency to get lighter with each set of hands they pass through. Cock-up combines with conspiracy, and often organizers have miscalculated the number of attendees, leaving too little money to circulate in a crowd of young men who have spent all day in the sun. Confronted with a derisory sum for his day's work, the sportif suspects his vieux, and the various members of the dojo turn on one another. Such a ready recourse to violence is already heavily conditioned by popular discourses about the falseness of elders.

5. While these vocabularies relate to ideas of lineage and draw on the absorptive principles of earlier lineage-based economies, it is rare that such groupings, prayer groups, gangs, musical ensembles, and dojos are in fact based in kinship or use kinship in any significant way for mobilization (see De Boeck and Plissart 2004).

"Honorable," mentioned at the start of this section, was not elected. In the riots that followed the 2006 election, his properties were looted, sometimes by the same people who had come to his rallies. Likewise, Kalombo was not reelected in 2011. His status as a *faux opposant*, a term that refers to the large group of politicians who were elected in 2006 as members of the opposition but who actually voted with the regime on crucial issues, almost certainly for financial inducements, alienated his initial constituency. But *faux opposant* status also meant that he was not positioned sufficiently close to the ruling majority to benefit from their widespread electoral manipulation in the 2011 elections. His electoral gifts, gladly accepted, won him few votes. He received no votes at all in polling stations where his own officials were known to have voted, and he slapped one of his aides when he discovered this. A member of his organizing committee told me directly that they had voted for another candidate. As this indicates, such exchanges buy presence, not support, and, broadly, this is understood by everyone. Participants are paid at the end of the rally because everyone knows that they will leave once this happens.

This is rational behavior by the crowd. Monies distributed for political participation are, with some significant exceptions to be discussed, merely an intermittent supplement to livelihoods gained elsewhere. The staff of life for the poor comes from their own small-scale productive and commercial activities. Most often, rulers represent a drain on this income, standing as they do at the top of a system that continually demands informal tithes from petty producers and sellers (Segatti 2015). Distributions from the great are simply too small and, being clustered around important events in the political cycle, are far too intermittent to buy real support.

As a popular song put it:

> Lelo nde oyé? Yo te! Tokolia ango na loso kasi yo te! (Today only you come? Not you! We will eat this with rice but not you!) (Dakumuda 2006)

The conventional view of distributions to the poor as buying legitimacy is entrenched partly because these performances are hard for outsiders to decipher. In reality, such petty cash buys performances that are mimetic of distributive relations that do structure political allegiance in the DRC, though most often these "real" gift relations are within class boundaries. Nevertheless, one does not have to be listening too hard to hear a clearly articulated set of discourses by the poor relating to the falseness of elders and the moral rectitude of taking the money and doing nothing in return. But this only poses the question again: If it is primarily us who are fooled, not them, why do elites bother? Before addressing this, we must investigate the crowd further.

Basic crowds are recruited on the promise of US$5, food, beer, T-shirts, or plastic basins. Those offering protection or a show of force get more, though this force is often largely aesthetic. As one fighting-man-cum-fixer put it,

> He [the patron] comes to me and says, "I need some guys for an event," and I ask him, "How much?" He says, "$1,000,"

> and I say, "Put $1,500." That way I will come with 30 petits. I take $500 for myself and give xxxx $250—[my] best pal. I give $25 to all my petits. That way they can get something to eat and whatever they need to give them courage. If it's beer, beer, if whiskey, whiskey, if it's dope then dope.

Introducing the Riot's Protagonists: Desiré and Likala

While this provides much necessary background, it has, so far, shed no light on why politicians will commission such figures. In tracing the story of Desiré, who would become a key protagonist in the riot, we start to establish certain key aspects of what is happening. Desiré worked in the National Assembly, was a member of the PPRD, and was widely seen as the petit of Justin Mibeko, a minister mentioned at the start of this paper. Desiré wanted to be the leader of the Calvare PPRD and to head its electoral list in the Calvare electoral district (heading the party list makes election more likely). Mibeko represented powerful support, but there was an obstacle in Desiré's way: Modeste Ekonda, sitting head of the PPRD in the Calvare electoral district. Modeste was a deputy in the National Assembly. He owns a television station and a newspaper; he has connections to the mineral economy and investments in South Africa. He was known and reasonably popular in Calvare, even though the PPRD is generally not liked in Kinshasa. Desiré, by contrast, was unknown, the protégé of an unpopular politician in an unpopular party. Before Desiré showed up in 2010, Modeste was clear leader of the party in Calvare. Toward the end of the 2006 election, Modeste employed two famous "bodyguards," *Maître* Yoka and *Maître* Jos, who were specialists in Congolese all-in fighting, known as *mukumbusu* (gorilla). There may have been some value in these huge men as bodyguards, but they were also part of the image that Modeste was cultivating, of the *grand* surrounded by people and especially by bodyguards. Yoka and Jos were famous in the district, and fighting men of this sort were popular with poor young men.

Desiré realized the draw of such fighting men. And his thoughts turned to Likala. Likala is from Malolé, the aforementioned poor neighborhood. He was not well-off growing up and is uncomfortable in French, easy fluency being associated with higher social class. He is a black belt and has competed for the DRC in international competitions, but converting his success into financial reward was not so easy. One of his friends told me that, on returning victorious from a competition abroad, he was invited for an "audience" with a minister. Such meetings are understood to encompass a payment. The story, relatively common, is that senior administrators at the judo federation received details about the timings and took the meeting without Likala. All Likala got was a few hundred dollars. Judo was not the only field where Likala made a mark. In 2009 he released a song. A patchwork of several rather lewd shouts and dance steps, it was a big hit. One of its interesting chants makes reference to a belief about mystical stealers of penises (alleged to be West Africans trading in the marketplace) who could make the sex organ disappear by touching the victim that briefly took hold in 2008 (see also Bonhomme 2009).

> Est-que elimwa? Te ezali! Simba bord! (Has it disappeared? No, it's there! Touch your thing [to make sure]!)

Though the song blared from a thousand bars and parties, it garnered no money for Likala. The main dance and chant were turned into a second hit by an established pop star, a friend to politicians and businessmen, who had the set-up to profit from such success in Kinshasa's royalty-free creative environment.

These stories make a wider point: Likala was hard done by. He was one of the DRC's most successful sportsmen, creative and talented besides, but he made little money. As his competition years drew to a close, he had few prospects until he met Desiré. Desiré realized that Likala was poor and hard done by and that they could be useful to each other. So the next time Likala came back from competing abroad, Desiré rented a small crowd and went to meet him at the airport. Being met by a noisy throng when returning from abroad is regarded as a mark of success in Kinshasa, and street children rent themselves out to provide such acclaim (Geenen 2009:353). Sources told me that Desiré also presented Likala with a generous envelope. These overtures made an impression, and around then he joined the PPRD youth league. On joining, Likala was given a motorcycle emblazoned with the party logo. Many also say that he was given a pistol, but this is contradicted by better-informed sources and, as we will see, seems unlikely. Then he was put to work. In 2010, before the elections, Desiré organized an event that showcased the might of the local PPRD, including a mass run of several miles: jogging (of the kind that boxers do for stamina) is associated with the sportif. The event also included a large *carneval*, which is what a truck with a sound system on it is called in the DRC.

Likala was respected among the sportifs and mobilized hundreds of them. With him on its side and the money distributed, the event attracted a large number of people. Kabila himself is said to have attended. A gloss put to me was that this was at Mibeko's behest and that he presented Desiré to the president with the words "*Ye-o mosusu te!*" (Him, not another!), pressing Desiré's case in the factional struggle in the light of the impressive manifestation they had just witnessed. This version has a mythological ring to it, not least because Kabila cannot speak Lingala, the language of the capital. But as ideology, this idea that Desiré became anointed after the inner circle had seen him draw a crowd reveals something important about the ways that crowds and power are associated in the Kinois mind. It is a subject to which we will return.

Likala Gets to Work

Likala became involved in the rivalry with Modeste in the following months leading to the 2011 elections. A meeting of the local PPRD was held. Desiré's people were already inside; when Modeste arrived with his delegation, Likala was at the

door acting as "security." Absurdly, Likala claimed not to recognize Modeste or his delegation, blocking their path. Yoka, Jos, and the entourage tried to push their way in. A fight started between the two sets of bodyguards, and in the melee shots were fired. Police intervened on the side of Desiré's faction: Yoka was arrested, and Jos went into hiding. Modeste managed to get Yoka out after a few days by getting another member of the inner court to intercede on his behalf. But Modeste got the message. He left the PPRD and founded his own party. This was not significant politically: the new party was one of numerous satellite parties that recognized Kabila as *authorité morale* and fitted with the PPRD's wider strategy of encouraging some candidates to stand as pseudoindependents.[6] But it left the field clear for Desiré to head the local federation and top the PPRD list in the district.

Likala's usefulness continued. In the run-up to elections, certain sportifs smashed one of the sites used by the "standing-up parliamentarians" (*parlementaires débouts*). *Parlementaires débouts* are a kind of open-air pro-opposition debating club found throughout the city. One of the main sites for this in Calvare is near a petrol station en route from Desiré's headquarters. There was much strong heckling from the "parliamentarians" whenever the PPRD entourage went past, and everyone I spoke to attributed the sabotage to Likala acting at Desiré's behest. As the election season came into view, things got more intense. When UDPS opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi went to present his candidature for the presidency, he was accompanied by a huge crowd, and returning, they passed the interfederal headquarters of the PPRD, guarded by police. Massively outnumbered, the police panicked and fired in the air. Members of the crowd then threw petrol bombs at the police. The next night, the headquarters of the UDPS was burned down. Again, Kinshasa's rumor mill discerned the hand of Likala. Eyewitnesses told me that they saw Likala's petits filling containers with petrol at the station just before the arson, and one informant claimed to have been offered a part in the job. I was told that Likala was given US$50,000 for this act. Most aspects of the story are plausible, though as we will see later, a version of it that contained unlikely claims also spread in the Kinois rumor mill.

Which brings us to the riot. Two days before the election, Desiré went with a *carneval* and entourage, including Likala's *écurie*, to offer gifts to the church in Ebende. On the way, they passed near an ironware market, and insults were traded between locals and the procession. Youths followed Desiré's group holding pieces of iron, and when they arrived at the church, there was already some fighting. The bana Ebende began to throw stones at the PPRD procession. Some say that Likala's sportifs threw things back and that Likala took out and brandished a pistol or even fired in the air. This pistol brandishing charge was made by nearly everyone who spoke about the riot, including some who claimed to be eyewitnesses, but it was strongly denied by individuals close to Likala who had not sugared their portrait in other ways. The accounts fit into a pattern in which Likala became a symbol standing for everything the Kinois objected to. As the bana Ebende threw more missiles, Desiré's procession took refuge in the church, whereupon the bana Ebende began to push against the walls. Units of heavily armed Rapid Intervention Police arrived, and the procession was escorted out of Ebende with police gunshots ringing out. It was then that the bana Ebende made their advance on Malolé to destroy Likala's house, but they were driven back by gunfire about a mile down the road: this was the surging crowd and the gunshots that I witnessed while sitting in the bar beneath the trees.

Crowds and Politics: Rejecting What? Buying What?

Given that such ceremonies often pass off successfully, why did the bana Ebende exercise a veto on this occasion? Ebende is hostile to the ruling coalition, and the period leading up to the election was particularly tense, with several violent confrontations. But many other such rallies occurred in this period, and numerous bana Ebende took US$5 and a beer to join them. Informant narratives repeatedly talked about Likala himself as the real provocation, and related to this were local rivalries. Informants spoke of bana Ebende "angering" at seeing Likala (from Malolé) and the PPRD in "their" commune. In this context, the flashing of a pistol by Likala was cited by several of the bana Ebende as the final act of provocation that pushed them into riot. But several well-placed informants denied that he had a gun, and this seems likely. The proliferation of apocrypha surrounding Likala points to his position as a figure of particular cultural difficulty. People "saw" him undertake various acts of sabotage. Yet the best-placed sources insisted that, while Likala was paid for sabotage, he was never himself present. Given how well known he was and how easily he could commission others, this seems likely. Likewise, his setbacks, real or imagined, were reveled in: Likala was abandoned by his fiancée, so it was said, because he could not put up a fight in the bedroom, and so on.

Transactional politics are common in Kinshasa, and most aspirant politicians will stage demonstrations. Sabotage of the kind outlined in this paper is also common. All this relies on fixers like Likala, and Likala exemplifies a common mediating figure, brokers, as anthropologists sometimes call them (de Sardan 1999; James 2011). But patronage from the ruling class to the poor is usually modest, and the scope for the enrichment of brokers is equivalently small. Likala did much better than this: he bought a house in Malolé and two businesses, one making coffins, the other running a bar. This pied piper of the lumpen proletariat acquired the essentials of bourgeois status. The problematic nature of this enrichment becomes clear when we compare it with broker figures who were in many other

6. This was partly to evade hostility to the PPRD brand and partly to game the DRC's version of the "largest remainder" formula used to calculate seat allocation, which favors smaller parties. The many other reasons for party proliferation in the DRC are too elaborate to broach here.

respects similar: Jos and Yoka, fighting men with followings among the urban poor. They have acted as strongmen and recruiters for wealthy members of the PPRD. They made some money (they have new clothes and are fed), but unlike Likala, this was not enough for them to acquire assets. They lived in small rented quarters and would tap people in the neighborhood when they needed money for medicine, a beer, or the rent. But they could go about as they pleased, and, despite their performances for the ruling class, they retained their status as celebrities without being under constant threat. This situation is common: hundreds of others sold themselves as fixers and mobilizers; few earned Likala's notoriety or his money. As a feeble pun might have it, as long as the broker is broke, nobody minds.

Shilling for the regime in itself is also not enough to earn such enmity. Figures like Aimé who use their position to redistribute money according to the strictures of the good leader can become hugely popular, acquiring legitimacy in the conventional sense, though, as we explored, there are severe limits to this strategy. More often, however, those who make it into the ruling class, generally from bourgeois backgrounds, acquire sufficient resources to protect themselves from the wrath of the street. Likala was different; his progression was from poor to petty bourgeois. His progress might have been more acceptable had it been linked to any of his considerable talents. But recognition of these was usurped by others. His betrayal also could not be accommodated within the normal subsistence-based involvement in politics. Real progression required selling himself body and soul to the dominant class and undertaking a series of eye-catching mobilizations and acts of sabotage for them. Contrary to what Africanist literature has sometimes claimed (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Mbembe 1992), such a progression was not at all gloried in by the masses.

So, to return to the question posed earlier: Why do ruling classes bother with all of these crowds and fighting men? Assessed against any of the purposes that Western political theory would assign them, roughly speaking, "force and right," the use of fighting boys was worse than useless. As "enforcers," the fighting boys did little enforcing and much to provoke conflict. Conflict that was then put down by violence, yes, but this was done by the conventional forces of the state—military police and soldiers. In terms of recruiting supporters or establishing legitimacy with the people in some other way, the logic is even more obscure. One could find some regime stalwarts who saw the confrontations during the elections as evidence of violent intentions by the opposition, but these were people who had, putting it mildly, already been convinced. Most often, the use of fighting boys reinforced the settled view of a pro-opposition town that they were ruled over by thugs.

Yet for individuals, such actions made sense. The use of fighting boys by Desiré allowed him to sabotage rivals and find favor with powerful superiors. To understand this favor, I return to the story of how Desiré and Likala organized a mass run past of sportifs. According to the story, during this show of crowds and force, Mibeko was able to press Desiré's case with the president so that Desiré could receive the nomination as the PPRD candidate in Calvare over his rival. The narrative may be untrue, but it offers a glimpse into how the Kinois think about power: the production of a run past of fighting boys was theater, and the poor were the actors, while the ruling class was the audience. The poor majority thus play a role in ratifying power, and popular followings can be useful to aspiring patricians. But we err if we conflate this with ideas of legitimacy, the social contract, or "popular sovereignty." Power is mainly justified upward in gifts and blessings that pass within the ruling class: the acclaim of plebeian bodies is a form of necessary prop. The successful aspirant (Desiré) is recognized by his superior (Kabila) because, having assembled a set of contacts in the ruling class, he is able to deploy the bodies of the poor in the correct space with the correct distribution of clamor and acclaim.

Liberal Political Theory and Its Alternatives

Kinois politics operates in a political economy of the body quite different from that envisaged in classic liberal political theory. The point is not to contrast an ethnographic description of Kinois politics with an idealized theory of European practice. It is, rather, that liberal political theory is so central to scholarly reasoning about all politics that we need to make some of its assumptions explicit. Following Hobbes, the wellspring of liberal political theory (Ryan 2013), the bodies of political subjects are like atoms: homogeneous, equal, bounded, abstract, and interchangeable. Yet at the same time, they add up to a single political body—the Leviathan, society, the people. These assumptions, of politics as a covenant between the sovereign and a formally equal people, condition almost all educated discussions of politics (Holbraad 2014; MacPherson 1962; Strauss 1963). Weberian theories of politics, which underlie most Africanist discussion, though different in many particulars, share this idea of an underlying bargain between rulers and individual subjects.

More recent, more sophisticated treatments recognize the way actual publics have been shaped by regimes of power, property, and social division (see especially Staeheli and Mitchell 2008). These accounts have limited influence in debates about African politics, where they could do much to problematize a discussion dominated by ideas of the people and the social contract based in patrimonial legitimacy. But even these more nuanced accounts, which recognize an actual differentiation of publics, ground their analysis in a normative commitment to the formal equality of political subjects (e.g., Simone 2010:120; Staeheli and Mitchell 2008:141–154). By contrast, the normative idea of the political body in Kinshasa is multiple, interconnected, and heterogeneous, with few assumptions about formal political equality in the absence of actual economic equality. In place of a social contract, varied forms of assent are sought and given and are cemented in different forms of exchange. Some distributions—generally those made from rulers to the surplus population—mark the most transient and

transactional forms of assent: ungenerous, grudging, insincere, these purchase nothing but presence and end on payment. Others, generally those within the ruling class, mark deep and open-ended pacts: grand, heartfelt, long-term, free of narrow reciprocity or calculation.

Political demonstrations where none of the participants will vote for you and where a wider electorate is not convinced are not useless expenditure, though individual events can be ill conceived or unsuccessful. Such demonstrations are rituals of ruling-class reproduction, rituals that require the bodies of the poor to be present but whose target is elsewhere. Thus, we should not view their presence at demonstrations, acclaiming, dancing, envelope taking, as heartfelt assent. But this also cannot be understood as "laying it on thick" while drawing on a "hidden transcript of resistance" too dangerous to lay before the patrician class (Scott 1990). Little is hidden, and the type of assent given at Kinshasa's political demonstrations is understood by both sides.

Procuring the bodies of the poor for demonstrations is about presence: proving a temporary capacity to occupy the space of the city, a space assumed in general terms to be hostile. In a situation where control of Kinshasa is central to the capture of rents and where ruling-class reproduction is far from certain, the ability to successfully deploy a crowd and to temporarily occupy a space becomes important. Where property rights are insecure and where not all accrued social power can be stored as money in the bank, earlier notions of people as wealth—as noise, as the potential for sabotage, as a culturally validated notion of glory, as the gloriously adorned person of the powerful himself—retain currency. Such considerations apply as much to the poor as to the rich and to the riot as much as to the demonstration. Where people are dependent on long-distance markets for goods and provisions but cannot sell their labor, struggle concerns the ability to sabotage circulation via bodies in space. This acquires significance well beyond controlling narrowly economic forms of circulation. There is a strong tendency in this circumstance for infrastructure to take on ritual significance. This can be seen in the rituals that cluster around the key infrastructures of the city, such as the airport and its connecting road, briefly discussed in Likala's case above. Airplanes and airports are key locations in Kinshasa's ritual nexus, and successful players on the city stage—politicians, sportsmen, and musicians—return from success abroad to be greeted by a plebeian throng rented for this purpose (Geenen 2009). In the more important instances, it is not only the airport but also the length of the Boulevard Lumumba connecting the airport with the city that are surrounded by crowds. Thus, in February 2016, the DRC's football team returned victorious from a championship final. On the day of their return, various political dignitaries went to meet them at the airport with rented crowds in tow. But this welcome was swamped by a far larger group of football fans lining the boulevard and chanting "*Kabila yeba mandat esili!*" (Kabila know it, your mandate is over!). The police drove them back, but it destroyed the regime's attempt to make propaganda from the victory; they were relegated from their performance as masters of ceremony in the city's triumphs.

This prompts some further remarks about protests in the years since 2011, especially as they relate to the much-delayed presidential elections eventually held in 2018. In the preceding years, the government was repeatedly forced into partial defeats or tactical retreats. The most important of these partial defeats was in the election itself. Despite repeated maneuvers, Kabila did not risk standing for an unconstitutional third term, something he appeared to be considering. And, despite widespread vote rigging, the regime was unable to impose its preferred candidate for president. Bargaining with a weaker hand than it had anticipated, the regime cut a deal with opposition candidate Felix Tshisekedi, who was announced the winner. This was hardly ideal: the most credible reports indicate that Felix came a distant second to the real winner, Martin Fayulu. Nevertheless, this represented a real, if partial, defeat for the regime, which has historically acted with impunity.

In analyzing this set of events, reports have dwelled on the formal opposition, in particular opposition politicians and a rejuvenated student movement. Particularly eye-catching was a group of young activists in Kinshasa called Filimbi (whistle). But there is reason to think that this formal opposition was less effective than it might have been and was saved only by the response of the street, which was operating according to a different logic. The opposition repeatedly called for mass demonstrations, but on each occasion, the government, in control of the means of violence, was able to prevent large bodies of people from forming or from approaching central areas. What transformed these protests from morale-sapping defeats into partial victories was the popular response. Prevented from massing or marching on downtown, smaller crowds asserted control of neighborhoods, setting up barricades with burning tires, and engaged in targeted looting. Targets included Chinese shops, which was xenophobic and possibly ineffective,[7] but also regime insiders. Known as "operation *toyebi ndako*" (operation we know your house), gangs of young men looted and burned assets belonging to regime figures. These mosaics of citywide rioting were not at all what bourgeois activists who had called the protests had had in mind. An illustration of the class-based contrast in political theory can be seen in the different uses of football metaphors by different groups. Filimbi is a reference to the referee's whistle, blown when rules are infringed. But the phrase *toyebi ndako* (we know your house) invoked by the looters was also a football reference. It is what crowds chant at football matches when their team is losing and is a threat to the referee who has given decisions against them.

7. There is clearly a xenophobic assimilation of shopkeepers with the Chinese ruling class, who have been firm allies of the Kabila regime. A complication is that Chinese shopkeepers probably do pay monies to local politicians, just as other expatriates do.

What I think this shows is that the ruling class and the poor recognize imperatives around space and infrastructure, distribution and circulation that are crucial to the kind of class struggles generated in Kinshasa. Oppositional elites, overwhelmingly drawn from a narrow class of salaried property owners, are less likely to recognise these imperatives, tending to express themselves in familiar liberal terms around rights to speech and to enforcing the written rules. Such a stance tends to attract attention from international observers who often come from similar class fractions themselves. But, as this essay shows, whatever their drawbacks, the riot-based strategies of the poor are based in a more acute analysis of the political economy.

The riot in Ebende testified to this antagonistic shared understanding between the ruling class and the plebeian masses. It was a negation of the ruling class's claim to control space, refusing its deployment of bodies and overruling the minimal forms of plebeian acceptance that had been purchased. This clear example of the riot as popular negation might be inserted into a wider taxonomy of riots in the region, where other forms of popular disorder, such as looting, might be seen as a more positive statement about the just division of resources and the (im)morality of various economic actors (see Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999).

Conclusion, Space, Riot, Patronage

This paper has looked in ethnographic detail at the events leading up to a riot and the ways in which distribution interacts with the politics of the surplus population. In conclusion, I will look at the implications for wider scholarship.

First, where the surplus population is the primary agent of struggle, conflict concentrates on distribution and circulation rather than on returns for labor. This is a challenge to the central agent of liberalism, the self-owning possessive individual whose political and economic rights emerge from labor. In Central Africa, this struggle is expressed in terms of the relational person, as the claim on a share of distribution tends to use vocabularies of relative age that also reference dependent kinship. But these vocabularies of dependence imply no reduction in material conflict—the figure of the generous elder is invariably invoked as an ideological critique of actual elders (i.e., elites) who are not generous. The demands of the surplus population, while unfamiliar, show a clear understanding of categorical differences between the rulers and the ruled and articulate clearly a set of antagonistic material interests. However apparently abject the professions of junior status may be, the claims that these professions encode are potentially revolutionary in the sense that, were they to be carried out, they would be destructive to entrenched material interests and the existing social order.

This brings us to a second area where we have shown that standard notions of politics present in anthropology since the earliest times cloud our understanding of the struggles of the surplus population: the notion of politics as the quest for legitimacy and order, as a contract between rulers and a formally equal people, and of the vertical distribution of patronage as the attempt to create the social contract in low-income countries. In this paper I demonstrate, in the DRC at least, that such claims are incorrect. Distribution within ruling-class boundaries is generous and establishes long-term allegiance. Outside these boundaries, distribution is paltry and merely serves to deploy the poor in short-term transactions. These events allow ruling classes brief occupation of certain spaces, but they also vibrate with the possibility of plebeian violence. There are examples when politically motivated distributions to the masses are genuinely enabling and buy real loyalty and also when poor individuals are able to use such patronage to "move up." But these rare cases and the forms of social dissonance they generate underline their status as exceptions that prove the rule. As we have explored, the real target of most political demonstrations is winning support within the ruling class, and it is this upward justification that explains some of the apparently irrational aspects of staging paid-for demonstrations that deploy transparently cynical youths who provoke disorder and alienate the wider public. But an even more important part of the explanation lies in the imperatives to use presence to demonstrate mastery over urban space.

The classic ethnographies of workplace struggle showed these to be a series of conflicts over control of the worker's time. This study suggests that a research program for the struggles of the surplus population needs to pay similar attention to the intricacies of the plebeian body in space. At some level, this relates to the structure of the productive economy—the most significant surpluses accruing to the ruling class are produced by rents from enclaves captured and distributed among a narrow group. Control over these rents relates, therefore, to control of the political and infrastructural spaces through which surpluses must pass and, related to this, a politics of presence that manifests at these nodes. This kind of material underpinning can be seen in a range of political actions associated with blocking the road, cutting the pipeline, and so on. But the politics of space and presence cannot be reduced to such material calculations. Just as the politics of workers and time encompasses a series of ornate and ritual aspects, for example, the drunken politics of Saint Monday, when early proletarians in England used drunkenness to enforce a holiday and resist the encroaching industrial time discipline of the working week (Thompson 1967:73–80), so the politics of surplus populations and space often takes the form of ritual demonstrations of patrician mastery or of popular veto. Asserting the capacity to hold and occupy urban space temporarily, via paid-for demonstrations, is a key aspect of ruling-class control: negating these claims to control via disorder is an important form of veto by the surplus population.

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Comments

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An Endangered Class

The essay that is the subject of my commentary highlights how and why surplus people from slums on the outskirts of Kinshasa turn up in riots to make their nuisance presence felt. In resorting to this spasmodic spate of public brawls, the rioteers assembled in gangs do not act out their own agency. The outbursts of anger and anxiety among the mass excluded from mainstream citizenship are organized by Congo's political elite, engaged in their fight of how to split up the spoils of a predatory capitalist economy. It shows the connectivity between the polar ends of criminalized urbanity. The obscenely rich at the august top of this pyramidal ranking have eluded the legitimacy of civic authority, while the destitute bottom shelf is blocked from gaining access to civic corridors. The spectacle scripts the actors and their micropayment on the front stage in this power play, while the backstage megatransactions of capital are kept opaque. The riot scene is an all-male theater of youngsters as hangers-on, drummed up by fixers who operate as linkmen to the seats of money power. The essay details the identity and behavior of the *sportifs* who try to elevate themselves above their lumpen retinue. Their aspiration for upward mobility usually ends in failure. The sporadic distribution of money downward the chain is easier to register than the more sizable and ongoing upward flow of informal taxation squeezed out from the nether terrain.

My comment does not address the article's substance, which I accept and appreciate, but is aimed at contextualizing its objective: the fate of people downgraded to redundancy in an era of accelerating globalization. The distributive politics enacted in Kinshasa should be understood as part of a more encompassing chronicle that Mike Davis (2006) put on record in his *Planet of Slums*. The backdrop to his account is a worldwide exodus from the countryside for lack of sufficient waged work and income. It gave rise to a shift in residence that has urged land-poor and landless segments of the working population to trek to the cities of Africa, Latin America, and Asia in desperate search of livelihood. But their flight from misery is not a repeat of the rural-to-urban transition in the North Atlantic basin that climaxed in the nineteenth century, accompanied by a sectoral transformation in west Europe and North America from agriculture to industry. In his findings, Joe Trapido rightly points out the irrelevance of political theory based on this historical precedent that suggests that political democracy can and should remain matched with unbound economic inequality. Instead of the slow emancipatory process that upgraded working-class existence in the advancing economies, slightly correcting the skewed capital-labor balance then and there, the masses exposed to dispossession in today's age of neoliberal capitalism find themselves held captive in a pauperized way of life. The crime-ridden landscape in Kinshasa is not exceptional. Although the undercities of the world have their own history and specificity, there is a striking similarity to the repertoire of criminalized politics in Karachi. In my account of the *katchi abadis* in this megasize metropolis, I reported why and how politicians in control of the municipality resort to underground operations. This bunch of power mongers adroitly maneuvers, in fleeting alignment with heavyweights recruited in the slum localities, to consolidate their grip on this headquarters of Pakistan's political economy. From the downside, gang leaders surface to penetrate, with muscle flexing, into the machinery of governance in order to launder and continue their black business in a frame of legality. Criminality and politics are two sides of the same counterfeit coin (Breman 2012).

The essay under discussion does not elaborate on Kinshasa's canvas of human redundancy. The people held in surplus are granted the capability for survival, but more information on how they manage to do so is required. The standard fee for joining in one of Kinshasa's haphazard melees is US$5 for the "young 'masterless men' denied possibilities for social reproduction." The emphasis is on this age set, which may altogether add up to roughly one-fifth of the slum inhabitants. We do not learn much about the household composition to which they assumedly belong. Females do not figure at all, and also the very young minors of both genders and somewhat older males remain absent in the narrative. It is clear that the vulnerability of the enfolding social fabric has its origin in the absence of continuous and decently paid waged labor. The household is made solidly dependent on hunting and gathering income wherever and whenever it can be found in the thoroughly casualized economy. Important to note is that although they are denied access to regular and regulated employment, the capitalist mode of production, distribution, and consumption has also critically permeated into the peripheral milieu of the surplus people. It means that in this setting of imposed self-reliance, self-provision, and self-representation, the primary unit of cohabitation hangs together loosely, vulnerable to progressive individuation spilling over into alienation. Enveloped in a regime of precarity, the makeshift household falls apart if its members are either unable or unwilling to contribute to the minimum fund needed to survive together in shared coping. At the global level, the social question has returned with a vengeance (Breman et al. 2019). The route from deprivation to destitution is one directional. What is supposed to be a problematic that concerns a residual part of humankind in faraway countries is actually the outcome of progressive inequity and social injustice all around, culminating in a renewed ideology of social Darwinism (Breman 2016). Pauperism is a state of deficiency driven by a restless lust for wealth, which, as in this portrait of Kinshasa, shows how accumulation and dispossession interact in interdependent duality.

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In a guest editorial for *Anthropology Today*, Didier Fassin (2006), writing about the violent riots that shook the *banlieues* of several French cities a year before, wondered why anthropologists have so little to say about the phenomenon of the riot: "What sort of epistemological or ideological reasons could explain such difficulty in analysing what is going on so close to us?" (1). His question echoed an earlier comment by Veena Das (1985:4), who, writing about the 1984 Delhi riots from the perspective of the riot victims, already asked why, as a discipline, anthropology had not generated a collective body of knowledge that could help us in formulating problems of anthropological ethics when engaged in the understanding of riots and other forms of collective violence such as looting. Notwithstanding exceptions, the discipline remained similarly silent about the 1992 LA riots or the 2011 London riots, although in recent years and especially after the Arab Spring and Occupy movements, the "Rhodes Must Fall" events, and the 2014 Ferguson riots, anthropologists and others have started to pay more attention to these and other similar forms of street politics, protests, youth struggles, and uprisings (see, e.g., Bayat 2013; Honwana 2012; Mitchell, Harcourt, and Taussig 2013; Nnyamnjoh 2016). But even so, remarkably little analytical attention has been paid to "the riot" as sociopolitical and cultural form *an sich*.

In this respect, Joe Trapido's reflections are more than welcome, as they directly address the analytical challenges that an anthropological understanding of the riot poses. His article offers a detailed political ethnography of the genesis of a riot in the months before the 2011 presidential elections in Kinshasa. Again, although the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC's) (post)colonial history has been marked by numerous and often very violent riots, rebellions, unrests, and uprisings, very little anthropological literature has been produced about the country's recent riot history (with the notable exception, perhaps, of Belgian anthropologist René Devisch's [1995] article on the massive and generalized riots and lootings that swept across the country in 1991 and again in 1993; see also de Villers and Omasombo Tshonda 2004). Trapido relates how a relatively minor aspiring politician in Kinshasa "buys" a crowd of the young urban poor (the surplus population of "masterless men" mentioned in the title) to stage public support, an event that subsequently produces the opposite effect when the crowd turns against the politician in question. Using this ethnographic vignette, the author asks the question of why politicians—who do not otherwise see public support as something particularly important—bother, and what is in it for the other side. Reading against the grain of Ferguson's (2015) argument about redistributive politics, the paper, in short, addresses the nature of the control and circulation of distributive politics in complex and volatile places such as the DRC's capital.

One of the main points made by the author is the fact that distribution is generous between members of the ruling political and financial elites but that outside the boundaries of this class, distribution merely serves to deploy the poor in short-term transactions that allow the ruling class to briefly occupy certain public spaces in the city. Contrary to more classic descriptions of patron-client relationships showing that politically motivated distributions to the masses are genuinely enabling and buy real loyalty or that the poor can effectively use patronage to move upward, the author sees his own example as an illustration of the fact that the real target of most political demonstrations is winning support within the ruling classes and that it is for this end that poor urban youths are deployed to demonstrate one's capacity to (temporarily) occupy and master urban space (a risky and volatile strategy, as it turns out, because there is always the danger that these deployed youths alienate the politician's public by creating chaos and violent disorder).

Trapido's text opens up multiple questions and hints at possible pathways for further inquiry. One immediate question that his insightful analysis raises is what happens when riots are not triggered by elite political players and power brokers. How, in other words, is one to read the riot the other way round, starting from the agency of the rioters and the affective infrastructure that their rioting lays bare? What kind of (political, moral, ethical) claims do they make? What gains do they hope for? From the perspective of the rioters, I would argue, the riot offers a specific form of claim making, an impromptu distributive demand for the values and riches that flow over and above their heads. And since, as Trapido rightly stresses throughout his analysis, this demand crystallizes around a politics of presence, it also means that it comes before any other political claim or demand and does not even necessarily have to be embedded in the "relational person" implying a membership in some form of (preexisting) collectivity. Rather than groups making riots, the riot makes the collectivity on the spot, in the instant of the (often unpremeditated and spontaneously erupting) riot itself, which is, therefore, almost impossible to fully direct, channel, and control externally. Often, the riot does not need a formal political cause, a manipulation, or an impetus from the "politics from above" because, as people well know and as Trapido correctly stresses, the surplus population in fact never benefits, now even less than during the Mobutu years, from a vertical top-down redistribution. The riot, therefore, should not be read as a form of vertical redistribution from top to bottom or as an instance of a political economy that redistributes horizontally, anchored in the necessity of a relational ethics (which, as I have argued elsewhere [see De Boeck 2015], is always highly problematic and engenders its own forms of violence), but as an eruption of undiluted anger that finds expression in the violent and often destructive seizure of space. These may be triggered by a political event or manipulated by power brokers, but more typically, they are expressions of a generalized *ras-le-bol* often ignited by a random happening: a car accident, a theft, a sudden and unexpected death (on rioting during funerals, see De Boeck

2016). That does not make them less significant as political events. Raw, violent, and blind, this instantaneous occupying, capturing, and destroying is a form of instant justice, dangerous, consuming, and utterly destructive but because of all that also productive, cathartic, and liberating, if only for a brief and fleeting moment. That is, in the end, what the real politics of presence is about. Not only does the sudden injection of fierce disorder enable a form of on the spot occupation of space, but also, more than a (micro)struggle over who commands the circulation of bodies in space or which space is occupied in the end, it is an occupation of the temporal, a productive disruption of "orderly" time by the unruly bodies of the "*bana désordre*," the children of disorder, as they are called, that is, of youth whose existence often unfolds only within the specific time frame of the moment, bodies and persons, therefore, that cannot be controlled because they have nothing to lose but that very moment itself. Contrary to what Trapido claims, perhaps, the riot cannot therefore be understood without a reference to time. As a form of instantaneous action, sudden capture, and immediate redistribution that often takes the form of destruction (riots almost always go hand in hand with random looting), it breaks open the chains of an unproductive time (see also the expanding anthropological literature on waiting and boredom) to create a gap in time, a hole, and thus a possible form of indeed violent and sometimes deadly, but always also ludic and effervescent, extraction, a sudden opportunity for "mining" whatever opens itself up inside the void and the chasm of the city. The riot, in the context of Kinshasa, is therefore about the right to the city in its most real, unmediated form. Here, in this urban now, the space of the city itself becomes a momentous site for an extractive politics that violently redefines the terms of distribution.

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Joe Trapido explores the "rituals of ruling-class reproduction" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's (DRC's) teeming capital city, Kinshasa, and he does so with a focus on the distribution of gifts (some cash, T-shirts, beers . . .) during politically inspired meetings, gifts meant to gather a noticeable mass of people. On the basis of thorough ethnographic research, Trapido argues that this handing out of gifts does not buy popular support (i.e., votes during elections) but serves to gain support within the circle of the ruling class exclusively (i.e., long-standing protection by highly placed politicians). Pulling a crowd is a sign of power and might and allows the crowd-pleaser to be embraced by the powers that be. Those who hold the stage do not even have a message to pass to their public; the message they convey is meant to be captured by the rulers exclusively: I pull a crowd, so I am worthy of protection. The author thus rejects the idea that these vertical transactions buy the legitimation of the "surplus population" but rather sees the horizontal transactions within class boundaries as the only sustainable political acts. As such, this patron-patron support is what is at stake, and it is the only reason why the gifts are distributed. Indeed, since these paid-for gatherings often end in violent riots, they hardly allow one to gain any popular support at all.

Further exploring this idea, Trapido contrasts riots with strikes, the latter taking place at sites of production, with a proletariat forcing an interruption of time, the former situated at sites of circulation, with a relative surplus population taking control of space. Sites of production (and thus industry and wage labor) being scarce in the DRC, the riot is the quintessential tool for the Congolese population to show disgruntlement.

I would like to elaborate on the riot in Kinshasa and what is in it for those who do not belong to the ruling class. For one thing, these Kinois joining the riots are usually male and young. Riots bring excitement, brotherhood, prestige, and possibly some loot. The elder generation has more reservations about joining in; having experienced Mobutu's coercive regime, they prefer to rub out their presence during politically tense times. Youngsters have far fewer qualms, though, and like to boast about having joined the party.

Kinshasa's riots—both the occasional riot after football games, concerts, or political meetings and the *grand* riot, with disproportionate violence and numerous casualties—have a distinctive hallmark: they are very explosive but also very short-lived. After the corpses are counted, life promptly goes back to normal. The confrontation of Kabila's and Bemba's troops in 2007, killing 200 people, is illustrative in this respect. I happened to arrive in Kinshasa just two days after, and day-to-day life had already resumed as if nothing had happened. Explosive but short-lived. In a similar vein, the urban standstill during *ville morte* demonstrations that Trapido refers to rarely lasts for more than a day.

Besides being violent and brief, another hallmark of the Kinshasa riot is that it does not happen when you might expect it. Whereas Omar al-Bashir in Sudan or Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, to name but two, were forced out of office by a surplus population invading urban space for weeks or even months in a row, Kabila's past refusal to organize elections had been tickled by merely a few days of *ville morte*. And consider what happened when the long-awaited-for presidential elections were finally held. Whereas the Congolese had voted for Fayulu, it was Felix Tshisekedi who—as orchestrated by Kabila himself—assumed the presidency. The Kinois were painfully aware of this situation but sat by and watched as Tshisekedi took the oath. They were just glad that the transfer of power had occurred without bloodshed (and so was the international community, at whose forums Fayulu's call for justice failed to gain traction). Why did people in Kinshasa not massively demonstrate to overthrow Kabila? Why did they not fully support Fayulu? Why are protests so short-lived? Why

this apparent phlegm? The answer is so simple that it is often overlooked.

The 2019 Human Development Index Ranking classifies the DRC in the one hundred seventy-ninth position of 189 countries. These figures do not have a face, though, and hardly express what it means in the daily lives of the Kinois. Take, for instance, Didier, a taxi driver. He lives in a rented house on a compound with two other families. They all share one water tap, as well as the outdoor spot to shower and an adjacent latrine. Didier's house has two rooms, and his four children sleep in one, Didier and his wife in the living room. The iron roof leaks. Electricity comes on Tuesdays and Thursdays; a fridge is pointless and charging phones a challenge. The foam mattress is musty, the chair is missing a leg, and the door is broken. Everything is broken. His wife sells some foodstuff in front of the compound to complement the household's income. They pray that their landlord will not kick them out because he has found a tenant willing to pay more. They pray that no one gets hospitalized, as this means a financial disaster. Elections are rigged, laws not respected, safety not secured.

The broad majority of Kinois consists of Didiers. They do not have any financial reserves but live from day to day. There is no food on the table as long as the breadwinners' presence is wanted in a public outcry. A demonstration or a riot is short-lived out of necessity. The president we wished for has not been installed? Kinois have bigger fish to fry today.

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This paper provides comprehensive coverage of the historical, social, political, and cultural issues relating to paid demonstrations, riots, and mutual political expectations between leaders and followers (especially conflicts opposing leaders themselves), which have led to political changes and individuals' upward social mobility in the current Congo. Since 2006, the year in which Congolese people experienced for the first time so-called democratic elections, much has been written about issues related to these events. However, few studies pay attention to realities at the intersection of rumors, money, personal advancement, class struggle, and space through the notions of horizontal and vertical distributive politics and surplus populations to reveal how these shape politics in the Congo. In doing so, this paper moves beyond the extant literature, which puts more emphasis on ethnicity, electoral fraud, and the dishonesty ascribed to Congolese politicians.

Rich in empirical details, this ethnographic research unearths chicaneries around mutual expectations between political leaders and their followers. It thus shows how each of these actors pushes forward their agendas either to make money or to get timely popular support. What is so striking is the way that it demonstrates how actors involved in the abovementioned relations aim to access economic improvement or job positions. In that, politicians use individuals' bodies to occupy some spaces to demonstrate their popularity. From that perspective, they seek to get some privileges in their political parties as well as in the government.

From a brief historical perspective, the paper shows how distributive politics, demonstrations, and riots have been significant factors leading to political dynamics in the Congo, especially the changes of political regimes. This paper also gives interesting nuance to the notion of capital social or social ties among Congolese politicians in the ruling class. In that, it allows us to get relevant insights about the way that strong connections with key political players in the Congo do or do not guarantee political protections for some members of ruling class.

What has also attracted me in this paper are requirements around political progression or social mobility among members of the ruling class. Among these requirements, the paper mentions the selling of body and soul to the dominant class and the capacity to undertake vivid mobilizations and actions of sabotage in favor of the dominant class. In addition, to be able to have interesting contacts with the barons of the ruling class is a golden key for success in the Congolese political sphere.

It has made use of theoretical and conceptual tools to explain a brightly sociocultural and political reality that is still overlooked in the academic community. Yet Trapido debunks theories that suggest that politicians manipulate people's feelings for their own selfish interests. He cogently shows that some poor people have the propensity to seize the opportunity of being at the service of politicians to assure their upward social mobility.

The paper might be one of the best publications written on Congolese political issues linked to riots, demonstrations, relationships between political leaders and their so-called followers, and internal conflicts among members of the ruling party. I will therefore be surprised if any amateur or expert on Congolese studies will question or belittle such a remarkable, cutting-edge, and nonpareil paper on Congolese politics.

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In his masterful anatomy of an electoral campaign event gone awry in a popular district of Kinshasa, Joe Trapido develops a compelling cast of characters and untangles a multiplicity of conceptual knots. Two major lines of argument emerge. First, the piece hammers on the rationality of riots as a mode of plebeian action. The author builds here on key insights from his recent monograph on music patronage in the Congo and among Congolese migrants in Europe (Trapido 2017). Particularly relevant is the idea, developed in different chapters of the book, that inflation, depletion of state revenues, and

economic collapse ushered "epochal changes" in the Congo-Zaire during the 1970s and 1980s. These shifts in political economy meant that an early postcolonial capitalist logic of accumulation gave way to a system of valuation emphasizing wealth in people and encouraging "ritual demonstrations of personal worth." In this context, it made sense for poor Congolese migrants to spend enormous resources (often obtained illegally) on musicians who would praise them in songs as successful, worthy patrons. Similarly, as the author elaborates in the present article, riots and lootings that are reaffirming a moral economy of distribution appear to be the soundest form of political action for the increasing number of people who find themselves fully outside the realm of production because of the historical weakness of Congolese industrial capitalism. A second line of argument investigates the motivations of ministers, members of Parliament, and party officials in dealing with the urban poor. This discussion starts with a very important premise: neopatrimonial redistributions from the political elite to the poor are insignificant. In an earlier article (Trapido 2015), the author insisted on the necessity of accounting for the Congo's outstanding level of capital flight in analyses of social and political dynamics within the country. More capital exits the Congo toward fiscal paradises abroad than is spent in patrimonial circuits of vertical distribution. And, as the study of the 2011 riot reveals, when money does circulate through relations of patronage, it flows among peers and toward social superiors, not downward toward poor clients. Using small cash distributions to deploy the bodies of the poor during political rallies serves only "rituals of ruling-class reproduction." Whereas, in his abovementioned monograph, the author focused on famous musicians and other elite figures who manipulated ideological references so that they could be seen as generators of values (when they mostly appropriated the labor of others), the transactions around politics discussed here are fooling no one. The "masterless men" and the politicians share a common understanding of the rules of the game. The logics of the rallies, like the logics of the riots, are legible to all.

The article therefore shows that, despite a common culture, the political system does not create incentives for sustained relations between the poor and the elite. This disconnection renders the strategic positions of people like Likala as mediators between the two groups even more crucial and delicate—as the article ultimately elucidates, Likala's class treason was the main factor that triggered the riot. What this reader finds particularly illuminating in the social drama depicted in the article is that the figure of mediation is also a violent figure. It is not irrelevant to note that one of the politicians featured in the piece (Justin Mibeko) was widely perceived (by Congolese public opinion, as well as international human rights groups and foreign diplomats) as one of the main architects of the regime of the violent state repression of dissent mounted by the Kabila administration in the 2000s and 2010s. Mibeko was notably accused of having weaponized members of street gangs (*kuluna*) and street children (*shegue*) to intimidate political opponents and generate a climate of insecurity and chaos in Kinshasa. The cooperation between Mibeko's protégé and Likala illustrates the politicization of the disenfranchised youth—a link that the author mentioned elsewhere in a piece that already briefly alluded to the riot against Likala (Trapido 2016). The authorities have been unable and probably unwilling to ensure the exclusive allegiance of the *kuluna* and the *shegue*, which further reinforces the author's point about the extremely feeble nature of the bargain linking the poor to the elite (see also Dugrand 2016). Even more importantly, the government (and Mibeko here again called many of the shots) launched a series of "anticrime campaigns" against the *kuluna* from 2013 to 2018. These so-called Operations Likofi, during which police squads kidnapped suspected gang members from their homes in nightly raids, led to multiple extrajudicial killings.[8] The volatile relation between powerful political operators and the *kuluna* suggests connections between the author's theorization of elite patronage and plebeian struggles over space, on the one hand, and the question of violence in the Kabila era, on the other hand. Despite the specificity of Kinshasa, there may be more of a continuity than a rupture between the disruptive manipulation of young male bodies in the capital city and the chains of insurrections, massacres, and rebellions elsewhere in the country (armed violence in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu comes to mind, but insurrections and counterinsurrections also devastated multiple other regions through the 2000s, most particularly in the Lower Congo and Kasai regions). Destructive murderous violence, what Achille Mbembe (2019) calls the "subjugation of life to the power of death," has certainly been a prominent form of the "politics of presence" in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including in Kinshasa. The police may not have killed any rioters when they came to the rescue of Likala and his elite patron in 2011, but they did make many victims in the long series of clashes around the end of Kabila's presidency from 2015 to 2018 (see, e.g., Polet 2016). The present article makes a strong case to explain the logics of plebeian violence, together with the logics of competition within political elite circles. It also creates grounds for a productive dialogue with approaches of violence in the Congo as a social pathology symptomatic of a generalized anomie that resulted from the same shifts in political economy mentioned above in this response (see, e.g., Yoka 1999)

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The reality described in the political and economic anthropology of Joe Trapido is in no way fictional and derives all its relevance from everyday behaviors observed in Kinshasa. The figures for unemployment in the Democratic Republic of the

8. See http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/02/21/dr-congo-police-killed-disappeared-34-youth.

Congo are estimated to be at least 70% of the active population and are clearly higher in Kinshasa than in the interior of the country. As a PNUD-RDC (2009) report notes, this affects those between 15 and 24 most markedly. The National Employment Agency (Office National de l'Emploi) is unable to absorb this unemployment, reinforced by the lootings of productive infrastructure in 1991 and 1993; the wars and armed conflicts in the east, which displace the masses toward Kinshasa; illiteracy; and the internal migrations of populations from neighboring provinces, still attracted by the bright lights of the capital, lights that have by now almost been extinguished.

This mass forced into idleness has become a weapon that is unfurled in the streets. A first form of riot would be the type of riot that aims at the direct occupation of the streets to effect political outcomes. A more recent example (than those in this article) would be the confrontations of June 24, 2020, which pitted the "*combattants*," the supporters of President Felix Tshisekedi and his party, Union pour la Démocratie et le Progrès Social, against the judicial reforms proposed by the deputies Minaku and Sakata, associated with the Front Commun pour le Congo, a political formation driven by the ex-president Joseph Kabila.

Perched on motorbikes, some armed with clubs, the *combattants* and motorbike-taxi riders burned rubbish and car tires and blocked key routes. They ransacked the properties of implicated media and political personalities; everywhere was a dusting of confrontations between the demonstrators and the forces of order.

A second form of protest would concern propangandistic demonstrations put on in the electoral period that take the form of "riots"; these concern buying the consciences of hungry people reduced to unemployment and illiteracy. Effectively, the electoral season constitutes moments of "poisoned" solidarity; during these moments, politicians transform themselves into "bourgeois gentlemen" who refurbish electrical substations, hand out sacks of rice, or distribute cash money. Popular support becomes a thing bought for a low price rather than a form of ideological adhesion or commitment to a social project. Once done, it becomes the time of accumulation, partly to recuperate a hundredfold what one has spent on the campaign, partly to be secured against times of scarcity in case one does not return to the political scene again.

Political riots in the Congolese capital have nonetheless taken many other forms, such as those calling for independence in January 1959 and those expressing despair about the Mobutiste dictatorship in 1991 and 1993 (de Villers and Omasombo Tshonda 2004). These last were perhaps different in that, in the context of the end of the Cold War, Mobutu actually seems to have encouraged such an event, intending then to appear as a savior of the people facing the very social apocalypse he had caused.

Between these two events occurred the "march of Christians" on February 16, 1992, when the objective was the restarting of the national convention (tasked with managing a transition from dictatorship) that Mobutu had suspended. Thus, in sum, history gives us the martyrs of independence and of democracy but also the partisan martyrs who riot in the name of parties and political groups and nationalist martyrs who are turned against foreign powers (including the UN forces in the Congo) in the context of the armed conflict and pillage of resources in the east of the country.

In addition, for the tiny part of the Kinois population who have formal jobs, strikes are a daily fate. Doctors, university and secondary school teachers, office workers, and civil servants—all of these have significant arrears on their salaries and are sometimes owed years of wages. This often forms the basis of their claims.

The erosion of the value of the local currency against the dollar, which often serves as the medium of exchange even for buying a loaf of bread, has pushed even more of the Kinois into dire poverty. Wages paid in the falling local currency must purchase goods often priced in dollars. In the context of the coronavirus pandemic, this population is under unprecedented stress.

The proliferation of evangelical and revivalist churches is driven by this abject poverty, offering the shimmering image of a materialistic gospel. The masses who enter these churches are relevant to the themes of riots because of the imagery of worldly health, material goods, marriages, and travel that are propagated within them, but also paradoxically because of the impoverishment that they bring about, to the profit of the pastor, who becomes ever richer while spinning these mirages. One might argue for the taxing of such organizations, so frequently characterized by scandal and perversion.

To conclude, the reflection of Joe Trapido is a realistic fresco depicting Kinois society, which suffers a profound malaise and was late to develop economically and politically despite its great richness—mineral, natural, hydrologic, strategic, and human. The international political economy of the gift directed by the Bretton Woods organizations or the European Union, with which the Congo is enmeshed, has left this giant of Africa on its very knees.

Reply

First, I would like to thank everyone who has taken the time to write these extremely generous and thoughtful comments. I am a true admirer of all of the scholars gathered here and feel honored that my work is the subject of their reflections.

All of the responses agree that the riot is an important and underanalyzed social phenomenon. This comes across most forcefully in Inaka's response, and it is gratifying to receive this vote of confidence from such a talented researcher based in Kinshasa. Inaka's own forthcoming publications will, I am convinced, transform our ethnographic understanding of the

city. Inaka and also Tsambu further pay attention to another important aspect of the paper, its attempt to provide a taxonomy of riots and other popular political activities in Kinshasa. In this vein, Tsambu's piece elegantly relates his sketch of more recent popular politics to the concerns of my paper. It would be extremely interesting to see these developed at greater length, perhaps in relation to his own reflections on real and symbolic violence in the city.

All of the responses also accept another argument of the paper—that in places like Kinshasa, donations from the "great" rarely "buy" support among the masses and are not in fact designed to do this. While this sounds like a minor point, it runs counter to a fundamental contention of mainstream development studies and political science.

Monaville in particular relates this to my wider work in a way that is both very generous and gratifying. His stress on the rational and legible nature of political interactions between ruling classes and the urban poor summarizes my own thinking rather better than I have been able to do myself. Had I not just lost my precarious job in the academy, I would certainly have stolen much of this summary for future publications. As he further says, there is a strong epochal strand in the way I have thought about all this. Immodestly, I also agree with him that the kind of approach taken in this paper should be used much more widely in looking at the often violent social relations of the wider Democratic Republic of the Congo. Monaville is a skilled historian, and I am convinced that his kind of careful, theoretically informed social history is of far more importance in understanding the region than any number of political science books. In a similar vein, Eric Hobsbawm on social banditry, Georges Rudé on the eighteenth-century crowd, or Edward Thompson on the bread riot have far more to tell us about the situation in Kasai or the Kivus than yet another dreary discussion of "hybrid governance" or "neopatrimonialism."

As Breman says in his contribution, the essential backdrop to this is twenty-first-century capitalism. A social scene where much of humanity has urbanized without industrializing and where the classic route from rural poverty to urban-industrial development has been closed off for much of humanity. He is right to list Mike Davis as a key influence on thinking in this area, but he neglects to mention that his own work is also foundational to such an approach. I am pleased that he does mention his 2012 analysis of Karachi in the *New Left Review*, an article that was foundational to my own attempts to think through the politics of Kinshasa. I would also say that the works of the *Endnotes* (e.g., *Endnotes* 2010) collective represent an important influence on my thinking in this paper.

Another aspect of the article generally accepted by the responses is the focus on space and the "politics of presence." In her comment, Geenen summarizes this aspect of the paper accurately and generously, though I must confess I am slightly disappointed that she does not relate this back to her own wonderful analysis of the use of space by the urban poor in Kinshasa (Geenen 2009), a particular favorite of mine and, as I hope I indicate in the paper, a key inspiration for the article.

One area where I can end this boring run of agreement is around the question of "agency" raised by many of the responses. Breman, Geenen, and, more fleetingly, Tsambu all comment on what they see as the absence of a sustained political program "from below." Conversely, De Boeck questions the paper from a different angle—criticizing a perceived lack of engagement with the positive claims that he says riots and rioters do in fact make. Though I think that there is a lot that is valid and true in all of these comments, I do not quite accept any of them wholesale.

The ethnographic episode given most space in the paper—the saga of Likala and Mibeko, culminating in the riot in Ebende—illustrates the riot as popular veto. That is to say that rioting in this kind of instance negates patrician claims made over the control of space in the city. Contra what I take to be the gist of Geenen and perhaps Breman's arguments, I think that this kind of veto from below has a rather significant impact on the politics of Kinshasa. As I argue in the article, while the ultimate "winner" of the elections, Felix Tshisekedi, certainly did not win the popular vote, this kind of riot as veto almost certainly pushed the Kabila clan away from simply anointing their favored successor as president—a significant concession. The targeted looting mentioned at the end of the article was particularly effective here.

For reasons that are too esoteric to broach here, I generally avoid the language of agency, but is that not the kind of thing people mean when they use the term? Mass political activity, consciously based on the political analysis of the urban poor themselves. This analysis was substantially different from (and more effective than) the mass demonstrations proposed by more bourgeois activists who received far more outside support and attention. More recently, the popular threat of mass looting in the context of COVID-19 has prevented very stringent lockdown measures that promised starvation to the urban poor. As I suggest toward the end of the piece, I also think that looting offers pointers about what the ideological program of the poor is (see also Bazenguissa-Ganga 1999). This is because looting not simply is opportunistic but also enacts a utopian vision of the social order.

And here I would partly agree with De Boeck's critique. I do not think that the division between space and time set up in the article is completely false, but it is an oversimplification. As I say, it belongs with a set of heuristic contrasts, and like most heuristics, it can be useful, but it also leaves out important information. The riot does, as he perceptively argues, have its own temporality, and, related to this, it also contains a particular emotional register. Building on De Boeck's point, I would also make a link to Kinshasa's music scene, which, as Tsambu has pointed out elsewhere, combines a certain symbolic and practical violence with a rather intense and immediate feeling of joy and catharsis. The *bana désordre* De Boeck refers to are surely identified with the wild instrumental section of Congolese popular music and with the ludic cries of the "*atalaku*," whose rasping song generates a kind of culturally validated joy or madness. Such emotional registers have longer roots in the

region and relate to a specific Central African civilizational configuration around power, joy, and the dead, something that De Boeck's extraordinary work on contemporary funerary ritual brings out.

But while there is much that relates to fleeting and culturally particular emotional registers, there is also something that is much more general and connects to the kind of planetary conjuncture that Breman speaks of. Whatever else they do, riots in Kinshasa contain a "propositional" politics. An example of what this means is shown in the discussion of Aimé near the start of my article. Aimé was appreciated by the urban poor as a rare example of the political figure who "gives without looking" (i.e., without calculation). I did not mention it in the article, but his approach to distribution went hand in hand with a defense of informal livelihoods against violent seizure by elites. Here we see the basic outline of a much broader politics espoused by the urban poor. First there is a demand for the distribution of the proceeds from mineral-based capitalism to the masses—though note well that this is a utopian popular demand, not widespread political practice. This demand is generally formulated in terms of a critique of "selfish" or "jealous" elites, but it is clear and cogent nonetheless. Second, we see demands for the protection of the livelihoods of the poor from the predations of the ruling class. This stress on such implicit manifestos is not to deny the importance of emotional and dispositional registers, but such registers should also not be abstracted from the propositional politics that they are enmeshed with.

A further concern raised by De Boeck is around the use of the term "relational person" in the context of the Kinshasa riot. In a sense, I agree with the point; I find the classic literature on the relational person, from Leenhardt to Strathern, extremely problematic (though if I have to choose, give me *Do Kamo* over *The Gender of the Gift* any day), and I used the term rather unwillingly, considering and reluctantly rejecting alternatives like "paternalism" or "wealth in people." Speaking in a rather unscholarly way, I should say that it is my impression that Kinshasa has a highly developed sense of the individual and a keen regard for personal liberty—rather keener, I would say, than in England, where I grew up. As I think the article makes clear, the forms of association found in the riot are often fleeting and unstable. What I was trying to convey in using the term was that politics draws on a form of personhood that is very unfamiliar to the default liberalism assumed by most academic political analysis. Individuals here are not seen as self-owning isolates, political actors are not seen as Hobbesian atoms, and political equality is not held analytically separate from economic equality. Individuality relates to the capacity to choose how to connect to others—"a person among people" (*moto wa bato*) being the highest accolade accorded to a person's character. Relational person may well be the wrong term; it is certainly distracting, but I am not clear what the right term is.

As I said at the top, I am most grateful to all of my responders, and I offer them heartfelt thanks. The majority of my experiences working in anthropology departments have been exploitative and frustrating, but every so often I would meet interesting scholars who made it seem worthwhile. Having now lost all the precarious positions that I had occupied for most of the past five years, I am grateful for small mercies—that such interesting scholars were available to write these responses to what is surely my last paper is one such compensation.

—Joe Trapido

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