

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE  
Martial Frindéthié, PhD

# Lumumba (2000)

Raoul Peck

## Contents (Overview-Synopsis-Characters-Character Analysis-Themes-Scenes)

### OVERVIEW

On June 20, 2022, sixty-one years after the very first prime minister of the Congo (today's Democratic Republic of the Congo) was murdered by Belgian authorities in collusion with Congolese mercenaries, the Belgian authorities returned Patrice Emery Lumumba's gold-capped tooth to his family. One of Lumumba's killers had kept the tooth as a memento. Belgium's return of Lumumba's tooth came as a recognition by Belgium of its atrocities in its former African colony and as a gesture of apology for its crimes against humanity in the Congo. Today, the world celebrates Lumumba as one of the greatest freedom fighters that Africa ever produced. Raoul Peck's film *Lumumba* chronicles the rise to fame of the former Congolese leader, his strengths, his flaws, and why and how he met his death.

### HISTORICAL NOTES

**Pre-independence Congo** The Congo of the atrocities that Lumumba denounces in his speech on Independence Day is the Congo of which the filmmaker shows us historical images at the beginning of *Lumumba*. At the 1885 Berlin Conference that saw the partition of Africa among the Western powers, King Leopold II of Belgium tricked Western leaders into approving his private claim of a 1-million square miles of territory in Africa. The Congo Free State, as Leopold called it, was a vast slave camp where millions of men, women, and children, under the watch of 20,000 armed native soldiers supervised by a few Belgian officers, labored to collect latex in the rubber tree forests for Leopold's personal profit. The rubber trade was steeped in human rights abuses. At the time of its formation, around 1885, the Congo Free State had a population of about 20 million people. By 1911, a census published in Britain but not in Belgium reported that the Congo's population dropped to 8 million people. For British Journalist E.D. Morel, though tropical diseases contributed to this decline in population, a good part of the population decline in the Congo was imputable to Leopold II: During the twenty-three years of Leopold's exploitation of the Congo, 1 million men, women, and children died from direct or accidental result of abuses suffered in the hands of Leopold's agents. In October 1908, the Belgian government paid a disconsolate Leopold fifty million francs to give away the Congo Free State, and Belgium officially annexed the Congo as a colony. Belgium's annexation of the Congo from Leopold did little to curb the injustices against the natives. Abuses against the natives Congolese continued. This time, however, a group of lower middleclass Congolese decided that it was time for them to take ownership of their country's destiny and stop being governed from Belgium.

**Bilsen's Plan** Why was Lumumba allowed by the minister of the colonies to go to Accra while leaders of other political parties, such as Tshombe or Kasavubu were refused authorization to make the trip? In the film, the suggestion is that Lumumba, the leader of the MNC (*Mouvement National Congolais*/Congolese National Movement) got this preferential treatment for selling the beer of the minister of the colonies; a fact Lumumba did not seem to know, as he appeared baffled by the revelation made by one of his protagonists from the Conakat party (*Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga*/Confederation of the Tribal Associations of Katanga). While this could explain the choice of Lumumba for Accra, there could be a more strategic motive behind the Belgian administration's preference of Lumumba to represent the Congolese *évolués* (lower-middle class) at the Pan-African conference: to have a moderate, rather than a radical anti-colonial, Congolese leader in Accra. In fact, Maurice van Hemelrijck, the Belgian minister to the colonies who signed Lumumba's authorization, was a very progressive man, though the Belgian administration that employed him could view him as a saboteur

of Belgian interests in the Congo. He was a convert of Joseph van Bilsen, a Belgian professor at the Institute for Colonial Studies of the University of Antwerp, who had published a thirty-year plan program for the gradual emancipation of the Congo. A thesis that propounded that the Congo was not ready for independence but would need thirty more years to form properly educated leaders capable of filling the void left by any eventual withdrawal of the colonial administration. That thesis was in line with the thought of the Catholic milieu that Lumumba frequented. Among the Congolese who endorsed van Bilsen's plan were leaders of the *Conscience Africaine*, a group of moderate Catholic liberals among whom Joseph Ngalula, a member of Lumumba's MNC, who was also authorized to accompany him to Accra. On the other hand, this thesis of the Congo not being ready to take over its own destiny before a thirty-year time was fiercely criticized by some Congolese leaders, and especially by Kasavubu, who was at the time considered ultra-radical by the Belgian administration.

Lumumba was more malleable and could, therefore, go to Accra to disseminate the Belgian administration's thesis of delayed autonomy for the Congo, or so thought the Belgian officials. The fact is that Lumumba came back from Ghana more radicalized than ever, but more popular, too, multiplying political gatherings and demands for the Congo's autonomy.

**Lumumba's background** In 1961, at the time of Lumumba's death, the Congo had not a single trained Congolese lawyer. Most of the Congolese elites were from the class of *evolusés*, a title that was bestowed on the natives who could pass an exam about such basic things as how to properly set a table, how to greet a person, or how to fill a very basic form. Lumumba himself passed the test and obtained his card of *evolusé*, giving him such prerogatives as being allowed to shop for alcohol in a Western supermarket and being able to travel abroad. Lumumba only had a primary school education. He was a dropout of a Catholic school and was trying to teach himself by reading everything he could get his hands on and by joining many of Stanleyville's Catholic discussion groups. The fact that Lumumba received his education from a Catholic school and most of his activist training from Belgian missionary discussion groups did little to prepare him for his first post as Prime Minister of the Congo, a position that required a higher level of intellectual sophistication and negotiation skills. Colonial Congo was a nursery of mediocrity, and the Catholic schools played a big role as Belgium's instrument for the deliberate planification of future Congolese leaders' ineptitude. Catholic missionaries in the Congo were, in their great majority, dishonest clergymen whose interpretation of Belgian patriotism clouded their sense of duty to the spiritual cause, as they worked to delay the emancipation of the Congo. Lumumba's inexperience was ascribable to the Catholic school's delaying of the Congolese's emancipation. In the end, Lumumba's political immaturity played in favor of the Belgians' visceral resentment of the Congo's independence.

## SYNOPSIS

In the mid-1950s, a young Congolese man arrives in Leopoldville (today's Kinshasa) after having served a six-month prison sentence in Stanleyville (today's Kisangani) for allegedly embezzling post office funds. Hoping for a second chance at life, he accepts a job offer at a brewery belonging partly to the Congo's Resident Minister. His work as a salesman sharpens his oratory skills and brings him closer to the masses of Leopoldville. In 1956, he founds a party, with the ideal of uniting the Congolese people towards independence. He succeeds after many tribulations and becomes the first prime minister of independent Congo in 1960. His time in office lasts only two months. His nationalist ideals make him national and international enemies, who conspire to murder him. *Lumumba* is a biographical film about Patrice Emery Lumumba, celebrated today by African nationalists as one of Africa's greatest freedom fighters.

## MAIN CHARACTERS

**Patrice Lumumba** (Eriq Ebouaney): A freedom fighter and the founder of the MNC (Mouvement National Congolais/Congolese National Movement). He will become the first prime minister of the Congo. He will be assassinated after only two months in office.

**Joseph Mobutu** (Alex Descas): A collaborator of Lumumba. He will be named colonel by Lumumba. Later, he will collude with the CIA and the Belgian authorities to assassinate Lumumba.

**Joseph Kasavubu** (Maka Kotto): The first president of the Congo. He will also be coopted by the CIA and the Belgian authorities to eliminate Lumumba.

**Godefroid Munongo** (Dieudonné Kabongo) and **Moïse Tshombe** (Pascal N'Zonzi): Two leaders of the Conakat party (*Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga/Confederation of the Tribal Associations of Katanga*). They viscerally hate Lumumba and insisted on having him sent to their region to be executed.

## CHARACTERS ANALYSIS

**LUMUMBA** Emotional (*Idealist, Charismatic, Undiplomatic, Passionate, Unprepared*)

Lumumba had many people around him, but in fact, apart from a very small circle of his collaborators who followed him until his last days, he was a lonely man.

*Idealist: Pan-Africanist* Lumumba disagreed with the perception of the Congo and Africa in general as an aggregate of tribes. His vision was Pan-Africanist.

*Charismatic* Lumumba only had a primary level education. However, his oratory talent was captivating. His reputation as a charismatic speaker, developed in the discussion groups of Stanleyville, preceded him to Leopoldville and got him a job as a pitchman for a beer company. Later, he used his oratory talent to harangue the Leopoldville crowds and grow the constituency of his party, the MNC. In the film Lumumba's eloquence clearly put him above his fellow politicians as a natural leader. Despite their dissensions based on ethnic and regional differences, the more than forty leaders invited to the Brussels Political Roundtable acknowledged that without Lumumba there could not be any strong and credible interlocutor to discuss the future of the Congo with Belgian authorities; so, the Congolese leaders insisted that the colonial administration should release Lumumba from prison and invite him to the Political Roundtable before any talks could proceed. In Brussels, thanks to Lumumba's insistence, the Congolese leaders were able to snatch a firm date for the Independence of the Congo from the Belgian authorities.

*Undiplomatic* Lumumba's undiplomatic posture not only alienated him from most of his friend, but it also isolated the Congo on the world stage.

*Passionate* Lumumba's impetuosity came from his passion for the Congo's total autonomy, a passion that was reinforced by his participation in the Pan-African Conference in Accra, where he rubbed shoulders with freedom fighters like Frantz Fanon, Kwame Nkrumah and Sekou Touré.

*Unprepared* Lumumba was part of a Congolese elite that was unprepared by design. His Catholic school education was meant to make him intellectually and attitudinally docile.

**KASAVUBU** Emotional (*Idealist, Radical*)

Kasavubu was one of the Congo's key leaders invited to the Brussels Roundtable. Federalist by conviction, his dynamism in the film does not seem obvious. Yet, he is the one who, by his radical actions, precipitated the meeting in Brussels. Kasavubu received Lumumba's support for the presidency of the independent Congo though he later turned against Lumumba and voted to have him assassinated.

*Idealist: Federalist* Joseph Kasavubu was the leader of Abako (Association pour la Sauvegarde de la culture et des intérêts des Bakongo/ Association for the Safeguarding of Bakongo culture and interests). The primary objective of his movement was to protect the proud cultural and ethnic heritage of the thriving agricultural and trading ancient Kongo Kingdom that gave its name to the Congo. Kasavubu's approach was tribal and ethnocentric. Until the independence of the Congo, and even after, Kasavubu had not shaken off Abako's initial ethnocentric aspirations. He was dreaming of a balkanized Congo where he could be left

to rule as the all-powerful king of the Kongo people. This explains why Kasavubu was indolent and unwilling to help Lumumba find a solution to the balkanization of the Congo started in Katanga and Kasai.

*Radical* The film *Lumumba* does not do justice to Kasavubu. In the film, Kasavubu is an obese and amorphous character with no decision-making ability, who seemed to agree with every proposition the colonial administration put forth.

**MOBUTU** Disagreeable (*Opportunistic, Untrustworthy*) ,

Mobutu is an envious man, an opportunist, for whom the end justifies the means. From colluding with the CIA to killing scores of civilians to sully Lumumba, it all makes sense for him if it leads him to realize his ultimate dream of being the president of the Congo. Mobutu's only moment of sincerity is when he confides in the American ambassador that he has been haunted by the thought of replacing Lumumba.

*Opportunistic* Mobutu was an opportunistic man. He has always been envious of Lumumba's position, and when offered a chance to have it, he did not hesitate. Mobutu was not a man to trust. However, he wore his mask of a faithful companion so well that Lumumba gave him the most sensible post in the newly independent Congo, that of the army chief. Once at this post, Mobutu maneuvered to undermine Lumumba by colluding with the CIA, committing crimes to be put on Lumumba's record, and placing him under house arrest. And when the prime minister tried to escape his house arrest, Mobutu had him assassinated in his ultimate act of betrayal.

## THEMES

**POLITICS** (idealism, collusion, intrigue, radicalism, division)

**Idealism** Lumumba was alone in his convictions, alone in his struggle for a unified Congo, and alone in his methods to reach it. Little by little, his friends abandoned him on the way, were bought by his enemies, and delivered him to his death. When Lumumba founded his MNC (Mouvement National Congolais) in 1956, he envisioned the party's goals beyond ethnic and regional considerations. Before Lumumba's MNC, most political associations in the Congo functioned on the basis of cultural or ethnic appurtenances. Lumumba became quickly popular because in the late 1950s, a new consciousness emerged which more easily identified with his national, as opposed to tribal, ideas. For that new consciousness, Lumumba was the ideal leader, and his MNC the ideal vessel of national interests.

**Collusion** The Catholic school in the Congo was an instrument of the Belgian state in keeping the Congolese in a state of obscurantism. In 1961, at the time of Lumumba's death, the Congo had not a single trained Congolese lawyer. Most of the Congolese elites were from the class of *evolués* (lower-middleclass), a title that was bestowed on the natives who could pass an exam about such basic things as how to properly set a table, how to greet a person, or how to fill a very basic form. Lumumba himself passed the test and obtained his card of *evolué*, giving him such prerogatives as being allowed to shop for alcohol in a Western supermarket or being able to travel abroad. Lumumba only had a primary school education. He was a dropout of a Catholic school and was trying to teach himself by reading extensively everything he could get his hands on and by joining many of Stanleyville's Catholic discussion groups. The fact that Lumumba received his education from a Catholic school and most of his activist training from Belgian missionary discussion groups did little to prepare him for his first post as Prime Minister of the Congo, a position that required a higher level of intellectual sophistication and negotiation skills. Colonial Congo was a nursery of mediocrity, and the Catholic schools played a big role as Belgium's instrument for the deliberate planification of future Congolese leaders' ineptitude. Catholic missionaries in the Congo were, in their great majority, dishonest clergymen whose interpretation of Belgian patriotism clouded their sense of duty to the spiritual cause, as they worked to delay the Congolese's emancipation. Lumumba's inexperience was ascribable to the Catholic school's collusion with the Belgian government to defer the Congo's independence. In the end, Lumumba's political immaturity played in favor of the Belgians' visceral resentment of the Congo's independence.

**Intrigue** Belgian General Janssens was maneuvering to create a climate of distrust between whites and blacks in the Congo in order to undermine the Lumumba government and have Belgium rescind the Congo's independence pushes the contempt as far as inscribing on a blackboard that "after independence=before independence;" and that soldiers of the *Force Publique* should not be expecting any changes in their status as long as he is in charge. Janssens's goal is to show black soldiers that independence has changed nothing in the black/white rapport and incite them to take to the streets and sow disorder in the country. This is in keeping with the former Resident Minister's plan to retake the Congo if the Congolese authorities prove incapable of governing peacefully. A Belgian advisor in Lumumba's circle suggests that Joseph Mobutu be named Colonel to restore order in the ranks of the black soldiers. Lumumba summons General Janssens and discharges him for his seditious and contemptuous methods and officially requests that the Belgian ambassador see that Janssens leave within 24 hours.

**Radicalism** In the film, the first glance viewers get of Kasavubu is during the Roundtable in Brussels. The almost inattentive, soft-spoken, and idle Kasavubu could hardly be thought to have played an important role in the events that precipitated the Brussels independence negotiations that gathered Belgian authorities and more than forty Congolese party leaders. Yet it was Kasavubu, as leader of the Abako movement, who instigated the passing of Belgium's paternalism by calling for immediate independence for the Congo. Abako was no more than a cultural movement until Kasavubu took over its leadership in 1956. It was Kasavubu's radical rejoinder to van Bilsen's pamphlet for delayed autonomy for the Congo that put Abako on the map as a political party. It was also his radicalism that lost Kasavubu authorization to travel to the Pan-African Conference in Accra with Lumumba. The meek and lethargic Kasavubu that Peck's film features was in reality a fiery slayer of Belgian colonialism. Around 1958, Lumumba, and not Kasavubu, appeared more moderate. Though Kasavubu was the first to call for the Congo's independence, his understanding of independence was in federalist terms, whereby the regional and ethnocentric parties will have greater influence, and their leaders would rule as provincial governors.

**Division** When Munongo forbids Lumumba's plane to land in Katanga and declares the province an independent region, he does so from the control tower under the escort of a Belgian officer supervising Belgo-Congolese troops. When Lumumba and Kasavubu ponder the possibility of crushing the Katangese secession with force, Kasavubu notes that it will be easier said than done, given the determination of the Katanga Mining Corporation (a Belgian zinc, uranium, diamond and gold extraction company) to have a stranglehold on the riches of Katanga. In fact, at the Brussels Roundtable, Lumumba had suspected Belgium of wanting to delay independence until such time as it could separate Katanga from the rest of the Congo. Katanga was the hub of white interests in the Congo. Beside the Katanga Mining Corporation, 34,000 whites had made the rich province of Katanga their home. These white settlers, many of whom were involved in the prosperous mining business, had once dreamed of making Katanga an independent white colony escaping Belgian central authority; a colony where their social and economic privileges would be guaranteed. However, with the inevitability of independence for native Congolese and the strong probability of a unified Congo under black leadership, the settlers' aspiration shifted from establishing a white colony to making Katanga an independent country separated from the rest of the Congo, where whites would still have considerable political influence. For that, the settlers turned to the leaders of the Conakat party, Tshombe and Munongo. The leader of the Conakat, who from the control tower refused Lumumba's plane entry into Katanga, was a pun in a fratricidal war maintained by white interests in the Congo. Kasavubu knew that for Lumumba to retake Katanga would entail fighting the powerful Belgian army financed by Belgium and the rich mining company and supported by the white populations. The conflict between the leaders of the Conakat and Lumumba, which fragilized the Congo, was part of Belgium's strategy of divide and rule.

## **PSYCHOLOGY** (isolation, anger)

**Isolation** Lumumba was an observant man, and he understood that since his eventful speech of June 30, 1960, King Baudouin had no other objective in the Congo but to recapture his lost colony. Lumumba just lack the diplomatic tact to avoid alienating the Congo further. The United Nations' leaders were trying their best to help King Baudouin realize his dream of reconquest of the Congo, and America's dream was to slowly push Belgium out of the Congo and make this rich country an American protectorate.

Lumumba's misgivings about Belgium, the United Nations, and the United States were proved right. His natural impetuosity made him express these misgivings so bluntly in the face of diplomats that he totally alienated them, leaving little margin for negotiation. In the moment of its biggest crisis, where the Congo was a country almost on its knees, the Congo needed a strong leader with superlative abilities for negotiation. Unfortunately, negotiation skills were what Lumumba lacked most. On the other hand, the prime minister was not deficient in confrontational talent. For instance, where Lumumba could have been a little more diplomatic, he directly refused the Belgian ambassador's help, openly and unambiguously accusing his country of instigating chaos in the Congo. Similarly, Lumumba scolded the American ambassador in the hall of the presidential palace, telling him that he had lost all credibility in America's sincerity and would not entertain any suggestions from America. Where a diplomatic language would have neutralized positions and softened realities until such time as the Congo was in a better strategic position, Lumumba's impulsive language, especially in the tense context of the Cold War, made him the man who totally rejected the Western bloc; in a word, the man of Moscow, the man to get rid of at all costs.

**Anger** Unlike these African intellectuals, whose education could help them curb their radical stances with doses of diplomacy, Lumumba's uninhibited passion and anger often made him appear as an eternal rebel. In the Congo, King Leopold's administration was ruthless. The hard facts of Congolese's daily lives from 1885 to 1960 were there to be seen, which blatantly contradicted Baudouin's recollection of the Congo's history. However, on June 30, 1960, Lumumba's passion for a free Congo rid of neocolonial vestiges did not need to cloud his judgement. Lumumba did not need to throw the facts with so much bitterness at the face of Belgium, and especially of Baudouin, who was after all, on that day, independent Congo's guest. This is not an insinuation that being courteous would have doused Belgium's intent to see independence fail so that Belgians could re-colonize the Congo under the pretext of rescuing the Congolese. This is just to say that as a prime minister, Lumumba had no interest in acting as a permanent rebel, but as a diplomat. Baudouin's sermon was the last shudder of Belgium's dying colonialism. Lumumba did not have to retort with the hotheadedness of a rebel. Yet, one of Lumumba's greatest imperfections, despite his many qualities, is that he was always clothed in the garb of a rebel, even as the prime minister of an independent country expected to establish diplomatic and economic alliances. Lumumba's impetuous rejoinder to Baudouin's distressed, paternalistic lecture spoke of the Congolese prime minister's political unpreparedness.

**FLAW** (deception, greed, naivete, inexperience)

**Greed** The struggle for positioning between Lumumba, Tshombe, and Munongo relative to their parties' representation at the Accra Pan-Africanist Conference, which we see within the first minutes of the film, was symptomatic of a larger rivalry playing into the hands of the Belgians and besetting the Congo's future. The Belgian authorities were aware of the under-the-surface brewing rivalry between the Congolese party leaders and their personal greed and ambition, especially of the high price that they tended to put on what political post they would occupy in the eyes of their constituencies. The Belgian officials made sure to exploit that greed. In fact, Brussels had insured that the atmosphere of the Roundtable would be propitious to massaging some egos and frustrating others. The film shows well all the dazzle that surrounded the conference, and which could be enchanting and distracting for those who were allowed to enjoy it and create bitterness and suspicion in those who were not permitted to benefit from it. Mobutu, who was asked to leave the Roundtable because he was not part of the delegation from the Congo was very upset. He was one of those whose egos got bruised.

**Naïveté** Added to the young Congolese leaders' greed was also a certain gullibility that the Belgian official knew how to take advantage of. The hotel that hosted the Congolese attendees was a carnival site. Belgian fine chefs hustling and bustling to wait on their Congolese guests, young Belgian girls being ushered into the attendees' rooms, journalists and autograph seekers waiting in line to see the political leaders gave the Congolese *évolués* a false sense of importance and assurance, which, for some people like Kasavubu, made them let their guard down. At least, for the length of the Roundtable, the Congolese leaders naively trusted the very Belgian administration that they had mistrusted for decades and all but gave Brussels carte blanche to determine the military and economic future of the Congo. As they rushed back home to campaign for the legislative elections, the Congolese party leaders never raised the question

of the Congo's military and financial autonomy at the Brussels Roundtable. They left these two crucial matters in the hands of the Belgian authorities, which made the Resident Minister rejoice.

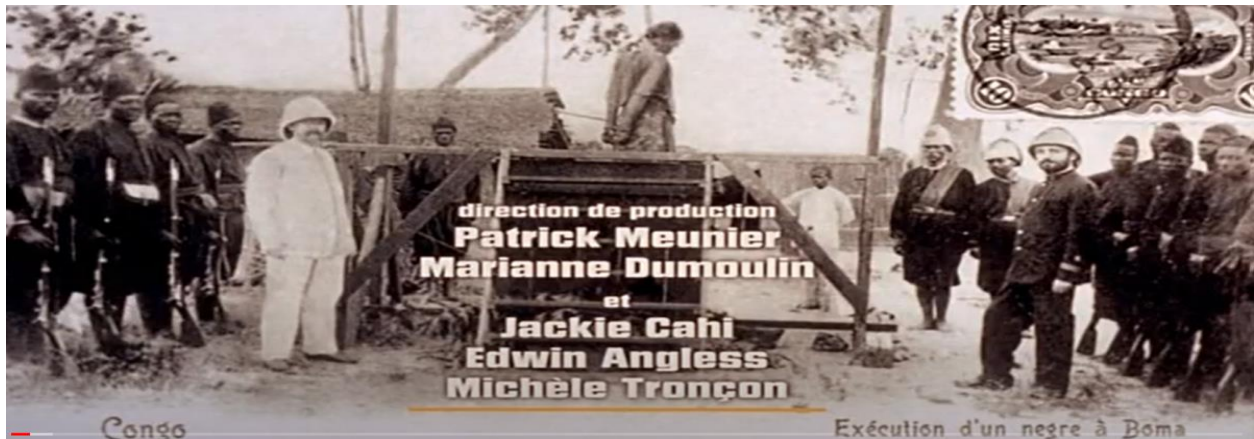
**Inexperience** The Congolese leaders were victims of their valuation of political power and social prestige over economic independence. Obviously, if Congolese leaders like Lumumba were pleased to be in the company of leaders like Fanon at the Pan-African Conference in Accra, they had all the same given little consideration to Fanon's proposition that decolonization had more to do with building a new society ridden of colonialism's moral vestiges than settling complacently on the throne of the former master. A clever synecdoche of the lack of sophistication of the new African leaders is offered in the film, when in the palace he has just occupied, Lumumba, the newly appointed prime minister of newly independent Congo, refuses to pick up his phone, complaining that since the departure of the Belgian administration, domestics are scarce, and the boss must do everything himself. Here, the Congolese *évolués* easily gave credence to the apologists of Belgian colonialism in their claim that for most Congolese, independence "consisted of a common desire to take over the white man's job as a means of enjoying his higher standard of living."

## **APPEARANCE**

**Deception** When, at the end of a secret meeting he held with Mobutu, the American ambassador suggested to Mobutu that America needed someone to control the Congo because Lumumba and Kasavubu had disappointed America, Mobutu immediately replied: "I think about it. I've always thought about it." This sums up the whole personality of Mobutu, an opportunist on the lookout, who waits for the slightest occasion to make a place for himself in the sun. Mobutu clings to Lumumba because he perceives in him a leader who can take him far. He insists on being part of the Congolese delegation to the Brussels Roundtable when the rules forbid him from sitting in. He offers his name to the rank of colonel in place of Mpolo. Ultimately, it is Lumumba's job that Mobutu wants. He finally gets that job.

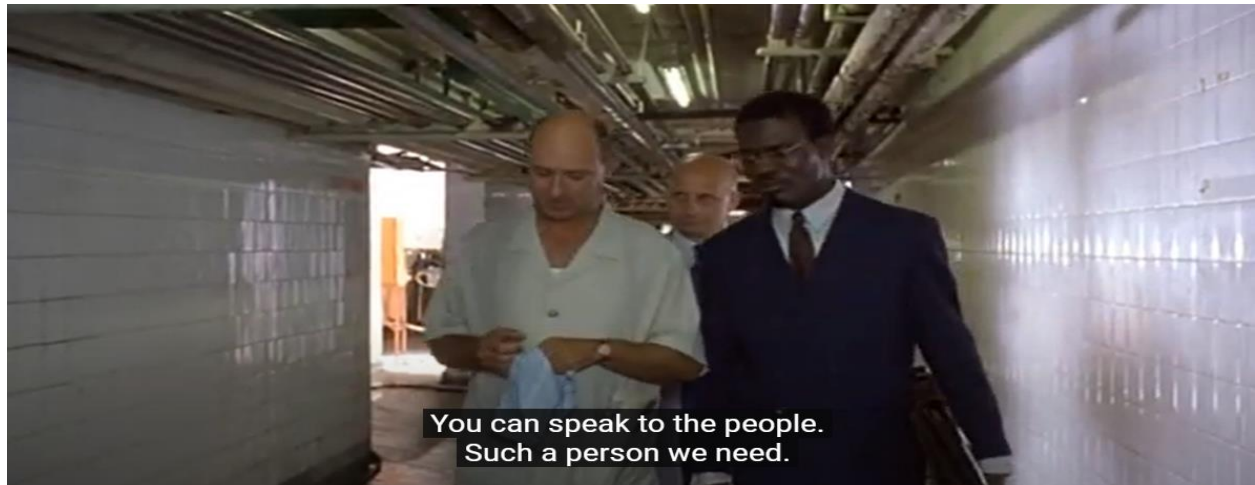
## SCENES

**The Belgian Congo** The movie Lumumba starts with historic images of the Congo under the sole proprietorship of King Leopold II of Belgium (first two images), and as a colony of Belgium (third image). The images show Leopold's native army (the *capitas*) which he used, along with his Belgian agents, to enforce his program of forced labor, torture, and assassinations upon the native Congolese. The third image shows native Congolese in Belgian Congo (Congo no longer as Leopold's personal property but as a colony of Belgium) laboring forcefully under the watch of Belgian soldiers armed with whips and rifles.





**Lumumba arrives in Leopoldville (Kinshasa)** Lumumba thinks that he has no future in Stanleyville (today's Kisangani); so, he takes a bus to Leopoldville (today's Kinshasa) and accepts a job as a public relation man for Bracongo, a local brewery, whose signature beer, Polar, is not selling well.



**Lumumba meets Mobutu** Lumumba's charisma sells a lot of Polar beer. It also gives him the opportunity to sharpen his magnetism, to gain an audience in Leopoldville and to make some new activist friends committed to the independence of the Congo. He particularly likes the mind and dynamism of a young man, Joseph Mobutu. They become friends and collaborators in the fight for independence



**Jealousy: Two party leaders confront Lumumba** Lumumba creates a political party, the MNC (Congoese National Movement), which is gaining larger constituencies. He is invited by the organizers of the Pan-African Conference in Accra (Ghana) as a guest speaker. Upon his return, he is confronted by Godefroid Munongo and Moïse Tshombe, who consider that their CONAKAT (*Confédération des Associations Tribales du Katanga*) is the largest party in the Congo, and they should, therefore, have been the ones to go to Ghana. Lumumba explains that he was not the one to send the invitations, and, besides, he does not see the Congo as an aggregate of political parties linked to tribes, but as a unified country. Godefroid finds Lumumba's explanation condescending and warns him to never set foot in his region.



**Lumumba's Growing Popularity** Lumumba's speeches are increasingly radical, and his audience grows larger and larger. He harangues his crowds for civil disobedience, and the word "independence" becomes recurrent in his discourse. The gatherings that Lumumba organizes receive increasing media coverage. The Belgian authorities try to suppress his political meetings with force.



### **Lumumba arrives in Belgium**

The Belgian authorities have decided to invite the Congolese political leaders to a roundtable in Brussels to discuss the future of the Congo. Lumumba, who was arrested and jailed during a random army intervention at the MNC's headquarters, writes to the Resident Minister of the Congo (the Belgian governor in the Congo) from his prison cell, asking that he be allowed to represent his party at the Brussels Roundtable. His guards find the idea pretentious, and while they are torturing him for that, they receive a message from the Resident Minister ordering them to free Lumumba so that he can participate in the Brussels Roundtable. The next day, Lumumba arrives in Brussels with bandages around his wrists to hide his torture wounds.



**Meetings behind closed doors** The Congolese and Belgian delegations each meet behind closed doors to prepare for the first stage of discussions at the Roundtable. On the Congolese side, Lumumba eagerly proposes an early date for the Congo's independence, for he fears that the Belgians might try to delay it further. Kasavubu asks Lumumba to be more flexible and trusting. On the Belgian side, some authorities refuse that the principle of independence be part of the discussions. The Resident Minister suggests that the Congolese be given a chance to experiment independence, but that the Belgian army in the Congo remain ready to intervene and retake the country in case the Congolese "primitive" instincts take over and there are slippages.



**Election: Lumumba's party wins** After the Roundtable, the Congolese party leaders rush back to the Congo to campaign for the country's first legislative elections. The legislative elections of May 30, 1960, give Lumumba the largest number of votes, but not the majority of votes. A compromise must be found to appoint the country's new leaders. After discussions monitored by Resident Minister Ganshof van der Meersch, which are fraught with suspicions, accusations, and denunciations, Lumumba is appointed Prime Minister in charge of constituting a new government for the new nation, and Kasavubu is chosen as President. Lumumba and Kasavubu meet to come up with names for the government.



## INDEPENDENCE

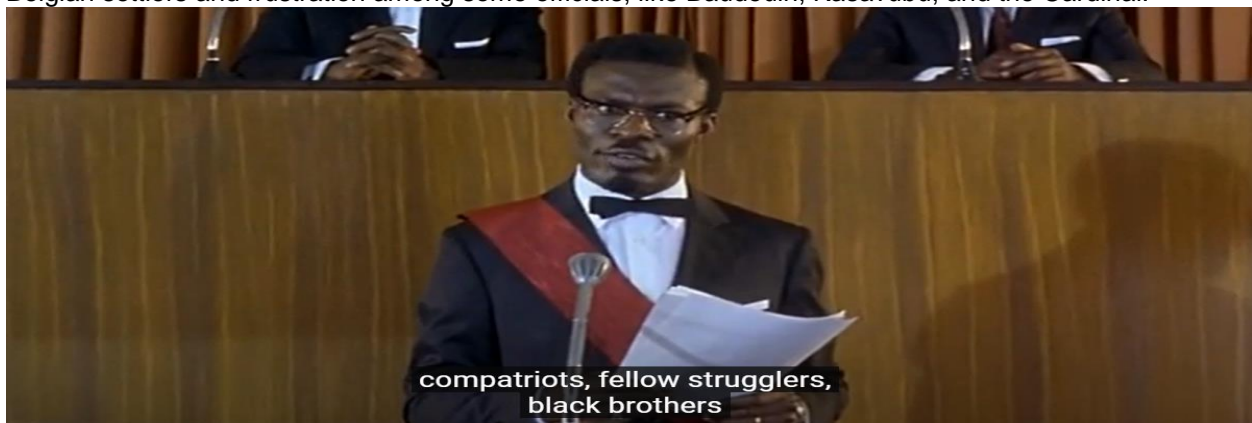
**King Baudouin's Speech** It is June 30, 1960, Independence Day. Local and international authorities gather in Leopoldville for the formal ceremony. In his speech, King Baudouin of Belgium praises his great grand-uncle Leopold II as a benefactor-genius, a great advocate of civilization, who sent the best of Belgium's sons to the Congo to work for the betterment of the Congolese people. He affirms that the independence of the Congo was greeted by Belgium with much enthusiasm. Baudouin suggests that the Congolese's real friends are the Belgians.



**Kasavubu's speech** In his speech, Kasavubu praises Belgium for all the sacrifices that it has made for the Congo. He thanks Belgium for the love and protection it offered the Congolese people, and he promises King Baudouin that the Congo will not deceive Belgium but will make Belgium proud.



**Lumumba's speech** Lumumba is not scheduled to speak. However, he considers that Baudouin's and Kasavubu's speeches deserve an appropriate rejoinder. He approaches the microphone and praises all the Congolese freedom fighters who risked their lives to snatch their independence from Belgium. He recalls the injustice and atrocities his compatriots suffered at the hands of the Belgian colonizers. He affirms that the Congo is henceforth a sovereign country, ready to cooperate with Belgium on the basis of fairness and reciprocity. Lumumba's speech draws applause throughout the country and fear among the Belgian settlers and frustration among some officials, like Baudouin, Kasavubu, and the Cardinal.



**The conspiracy** Soon after Lumumba's speech, the white officers in the military garrisons deliberately deepen the discrimination between white and black soldiers. Belgian General Janssens pushes the contempt as far as inscribing on a blackboard that "after independence=before independence;" and that soldiers of the *Force Publique* should not be expecting any changes in their status as long as he is in charge. Janssens's goal is to show black soldiers that independence has changed nothing in the black/white rapport and incite them to take to the streets and sow disorder in the country. This is in keeping with the former Resident Minister's plan to retake the Congo if the Congolese authorities prove incapable of governing peacefully. A Belgian advisor in Lumumba's circle suggests that Joseph Mobutu be named Colonel to restore order in the ranks of the black soldiers. Lumumba summons General Janssens and discharges him for his seditious and contemptuous methods and officially requests that the Belgian ambassador see that Janssens leave within 24 hours.





**Chaos** The dissatisfied black soldiers, drunk and out of control, take to the streets, looting white residences and businesses, and assaulting and killing whites at random. Members of Belgian militias distribute weapons to whites to defend themselves against the undisciplined soldiers.



**Lumumba refuses Belgium's help and blames Belgium for chaos** The Belgian ambassador proposes an intervention by the Belgian army to help restore order in the Congo. Lumumba suspects a trap and refuses his help. He accuses Belgium of planning the chaos to manufacture an excuse to recolonize the Congo. Lumumba is convinced that Belgium is not an outsider to the instability of the Congo. He is persuaded that this is the result of the old colonial playbook: *divide and conquer* meant to balkanize the Congo and have the Belgian settlers control the geological rich region of Katanga.



**Lumumba plans a peace tour**

To stitch the country together, he decides to undertake a peace tour around the country with President Kasavubu. In Katanga, Munongo's voice from the air traffic tower forbids Lumumba's plane to land by order of the secessionist government of Katanga.



**The Katangese secession** Lumumba and Kasavubu's plane turns back and lands in a clearing. Lumumba's fear to see the Belgians balkanize the Congo and control 70% of the country's resources has just materialized. The two political leaders explore their options, for it is out of the question to leave the Katanga, a territory 16 times the size of Belgium with immense geological resources, to the Belgians. They both agree that the secession must be crushed. Kasavubu suggests that they call the Russians for help. Lumumba retorts that this will give the CIA a good excuse to murder him.

**The botched reunification attempt** Lumumba decides to invade the renegade provinces of Katanga and Kasai and reunify the Congo. Lumumba's military campaign in Kasai, which is conducted by Mobutu, is a humanitarian disaster. It causes the deaths of many civilians, among whom are women and children. Lumumba confronts Mobutu, who has led the operation, and tells him that he does not trust him any longer.



**Political Intrigues** Lumumba is lonely, forsaken, and betrayed by those whom he trusted. His former political allies are working against him. Kasavubu is coopted by the American ambassador to whom he reports all his conversations with Lumumba. Mobutu has secret meetings with the CIA, which pays and trains an army of Congolese especially created for him. The US ambassador tells Mobutu that he is charged by President Kennedy to guarantee everything Mobutu wants if the colonel is willing to work with the US.



**Lumumba under house arrest** Using as his pretext the Kasai massacre, which the United Nations has characterized as a genocide, Kasavubu announces Lumumba's dismissal on the Congolese national radio. A few minutes after Kasavubu's declaration, Lumumba goes to parliament to dismiss Kasavubu's authority. Amid this constitutional crisis, Mobutu's soldiers trained and paid by the United States surround Lumumba's residence. Mobutu informs Lumumba that Kasavubu has ordered his arrest, but he will not execute the order. Instead, he wants Lumumba to remain in his residence for his own good.



**Mobutu's coup** Flanked by foreign officers, Joseph Désiré Mobutu announces that, for the sake of the Congolese people, he has decided to “temporarily neutralize” both Lumumba and Kasavubu. This, he insists, is not a military coup d'état but merely a peaceful revolution. No soldier will be in power, he says. He concludes that the Congo, a neutral country, stands ready to work with advisers, technicians, and experts from any country willing to help. While Lumumba is confined to house arrest, Kasavubu is free and continues to discharge his official functions.



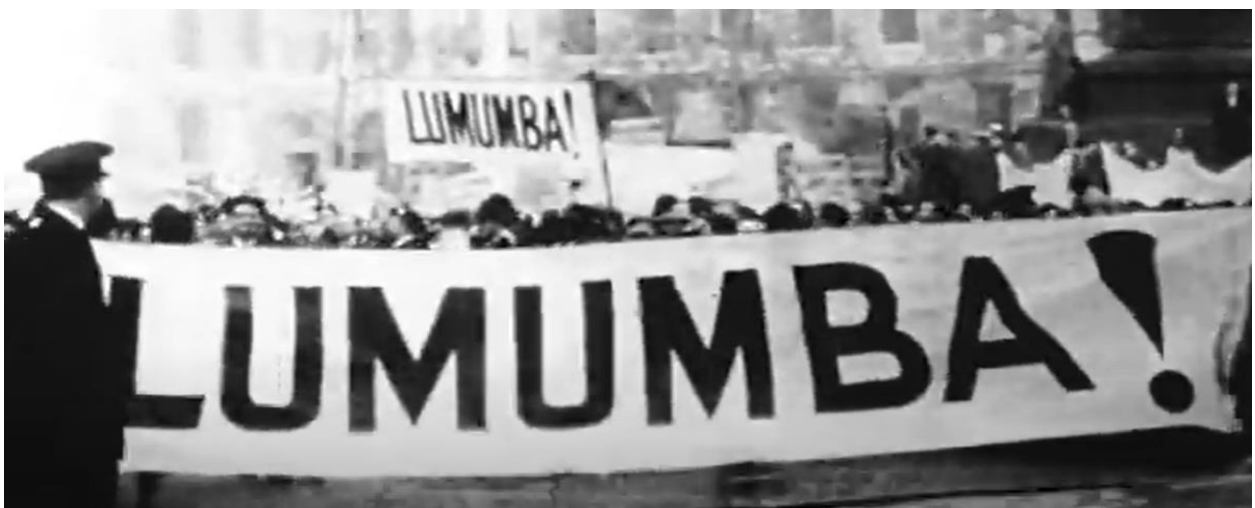
**Lumumba is transferred to Katanga** On a rainy night, Lumumba eludes his guards and escapes from his residence. His goal is to rally his hardcore supporters in Stanleyville, where they have established a nationalist government. The Congolese army captures Lumumba on the bank of the Sankuru River, with two of his few faithful collaborators, Mpolo and Okito. Lumumba is beaten, taken back to Leopoldville and paraded in the streets. Later, Kasavubu, Mobutu, some Congolese leaders and European officials cast a unanimous vote to kill Lumumba. He is transferred to his fiercest enemies (Tshombe and Munongo) in Katanga.



**Lumumba's assassination** Lumumba and his two companions are transported at night to the Katangese forest. One by one, they are stood against a tree and shot, and their bodies buried at a secret location. Then, to ensure that their remains are never found, Belgian soldiers are sent to unearth the bodies, take them to an undisclosed location, cut them in pieces, and dissolve them in acid. One of the soldiers keeps Lumumba's gold-capped tooth as a memento.



**Outrage over Lumumba's murder** Lumumba's assassination draws outrage around the world. Below are historical footages of people protesting Lumumba's assassination in Europe and in America. Today, Lumumba is remembered as a great freedom fighter.





**Mobutu's hypocrisy** On the anniversary date of the Congo's independence, Joseph Mobutu Désiré, henceforth Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga (the all-powerful warrior who, because of his endurance and inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake), asks for a minute of silence in memory of Patrice Emery Lumumba, the national hero.

