

***** Call for Papers *****
**Congo Research Network Stream Panels at the
African Studies Association Biennial Conference
7-9 September 2016 in Cambridge, UK**

Please send abstracts of maximum 250 words to the convenors of the panels below by **26 March 2016**.

Conference details: <http://www.asauk.net/asauk-biennial-conference-2016/>

**Social Value, Political Economy and Mimicry in Congolese
Popular Politics**

Convenor: Clara Devlieger (Cambridge University)

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As the DRC faces pivotal national elections, popular debates, actions and imaginations of political power deserve close and careful attention. Social practices and popular discourses form both the active audience to the national contest, and a field of vital political activity of their own. In the links between these popular practices and more visible national dynamics, political power itself is contested and shaped. In such debates and activities, how are national political activities perceived and received? How do different types of power meet and interact? Popular politics takes many forms. Through social and cultural representations including music and other media the behaviour of elite politicians is evaluated, praised and critiqued, while local political groups such as labour unions and civil society organisations respond to the language of state-level actors.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of these dynamics is mimicry and mimesis, a factor of political power since the colonial period and still a vital lens for the assessment of such engagements today. In the popular imitation or reconstitution of state level ideas and behaviour, the nature of political power is formed. On the other hand, such mimicry is also an established technique of contesting power, whether through cynicism or various forms of humour such as parody, irony, and satire. To what extent do such actions subvert or reproduce and confirm power? Is mimicry a survival strategy, a form of appropriation, an act of resistance or a claim to membership in a political community (Ferguson 2002)?

Whatever its form, this political community is framed by a wider political economy. Local organisations often rely financially on political patronage, and low-level actors often aspire to rise up in the political hierarchy. Economies of prestige raise wider questions concerning the pursuit of financial and social value. The role of imagination and social becoming in interaction brings forward issues relating to status, reputation, and the pursuit of prestige or honour. Through social and cultural exchange the behaviour of elite politicians is evaluated, praised, critiqued and compared. What constitutes the value of a political actor? When is unscrupulous behaviour considered valuable? What is the relationship between reputation and different understandings of morality? How does mimicry function within processes of changing values? Where is the

line between social value and moral goodness?

This panel explores the ambiguous relationships between popular practices and national dynamics that shape the comprehension and management of political power across the DRC.

Customary authority in the Congo: power and conflict in past and present

Convenor: Vicky van Bockhaven and Judith Verweijen (Ghent University)

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In large parts of the Congo, customary chiefs are a crucial source of both authority and conflict. Yet, the versatile and dynamic institution of customary authority, and its changing nature over time, remain little understood. This panel invites contributions that shed light on customary authority in the Congo in past and present. In particular, it aims to investigate the bases and mechanisms of chiefly authority, and the ways in which chiefs are situated in local power configurations and conflict dynamics. To that end, it intends to explore questions like: How can we understand and conceptualise customary authority in an interdisciplinary way, building on previous and currently dominant theoretical paradigms and concepts from a range of fields (e.g. political anthropology, social history, conflict studies)? What are the bases of customary chiefs' legitimacy, and how does this legitimacy compare to that of politico-administrative authority? What are the relations between customary chiefs and the state apparatus, and how have these evolved over time? What types of conflict do customary authorities generate or aggravate, and how are these conflicts shaped by and shape the sociopolitical order in which chiefs are situated? Finally, to what extent and how do customary chiefs deploy violence to reinforce their power position and how is such violence framed and perceived? The panel welcomes both historical contributions and those focusing on the present, aiming to trace (dis)continuities in the nature and workings of the institution of customary authority over time.

Money, Mediators, Mobility and Mobilization: The role of local brokers in the run-up to DR Congo's 2016 elections

Convenor: Lys Alcayna-Stevens (Cambridge University)

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Neoliberal trends to denationalize and decentralize aid have served to diversify power and influence in the global south, via a proliferation of local organizations and intermediary networks and actors. For Bierschenk and others (2000), an understanding of these new social arenas and assemblages can best be captured through an attention to the roles of 'development brokers'; entrepreneurial individuals embedded in a local arena who funnel the external resources supplied by development aid and act as the interface between development institutions and the recipients of aid. This panel asks: what roles do these intermediaries play in the run up to elections?

Many of them are influential actors in their communities, and are thus seen as a resource by politicians, their campaigns, and their opponents. How are brokers recruited and mobilized by political parties (and others: e.g. CENI, independent electoral observers and international organizations with political interests)? How do brokers

influence political actors and action? And how do brokers, in turn, mobilize voters?

A resource to political actors, brokers often also act as local communities' connection to national or international organizations; as representatives, they translate communities' needs into terms comprehensible to external funding. But what is their significance to the people they are said to represent? How does their relationship to mediators in other social spheres, such as kinship, religion, political organization and economy, change with the elections? What kind of role do gender and generation play? Does the suspicion and conspiracy surrounding brokers and their extended networks increase in times of political tension?

One of the most interesting insights of Bierschenk and others is that development brokers often utilise the knowledge, connections and popularity they accrue in their role as mediators not only to increase their personal wealth, but to springboard themselves into a political career. How do they mediate political power and authority? How do they re-route the resources they can accumulate by championing particular campaigns (including money, motorbikes and increased mobility) into their own goals for power, wealth and influence? What do they stand to gain or to lose? How do they manage local suspicions that they are seeking personal gain to the detriment of others?

This panel seeks to examine the novel relationships, alliances and conflicts which emerge between brokers and other actors in the run-up to the 2016 elections. We welcome papers which address the roles of development brokers – and local brokers more broadly – from both rural and urban contexts.

Martyrdom in Contemporary Africa: The Past, Present and Future of Dying for a Cause and its Afterlives

Convenor: Reuben Loffman, (Queen Mary, University of London)

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Despite the fact that there were a very high number of people who died for a cause in twentieth-century Africa, there has been a decided lack of scholarship on martyrdom on the continent. Instead, discussions of martyrdom have been dominated in recent times by the Middle East (broadly defined). This panel seeks papers that examine spiritual and/or secular 'martyrs' in twentieth-century Africa. Among other questions that we will be discussing will be (1) who counts as a martyr and who defines the criteria? (2) how has martyrdom influenced or been influenced by some of the most important themes of twentieth-century African history, such as war, disease, trade and migration? and (3) how are martyrs on the continent remembered and/or why are the forgotten?

Power and Politics in the DR-Congo: Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Public Life in Central Africa

**** PANEL FULL ****

This panel invites papers that consider various aspects of political action in DR Congo (historical and contemporary) and/or in its diasporic communities in the run up to the Congolese national and gubernatorial elections. We particularly welcome papers that in some way deal with the theme of political power and authority. Some important questions that could guide authors' thoughts include the relationship between national

and local authorities, the power of religious organisations to effect political and social change, the different kinds of local political institutions that mediate power and the ways in which voters are mobilised. We welcome analyses that consider local political action within a wider political economy. Authors might also consider how the recent warfare could determine political thinking in the lead up to the election. Questions of the interplay of race, gender and generation in the mediation of power relations in the DR-Congo are also welcomed, as are papers exploring religious phenomena and artistic expression.

Meet the Distinguished Congo Scholar Jean La Fontaine

Convenor: Katrien Pype, (KU Leuven)

Distinguished Congo scholar Jean La Fontaine discusses her work on child witches in London, followed by a Q&A session during which she invites questions and reflections on her presentation, her original research in Leopoldville/Kinshasa and her contemporary work.