

## CONGO RIVER AND ITS CHALLENGES

Dr. Dominique OBA & Ecole Normale Supérieure  
Université Marien NGOUABI  
Brazzaville, CONGO

### ABSTRACT

Europeans entry into the Central African region had been through the tracks of slave trafficking and most especially by waterways of which the most important was the Congo River in the east. The Direct contact between the European colonial powers and African societies would make Central Africa one challenge of these powers in competition of which the Congo River will play the leading role in the future of this region. Policies and strategies were applied for monitoring and submitting called inferior races and the possession of their lands while ensuring the benefits and economic interests that had called each of their colonies. The Congo River remains a natural geographic data of great importance both for the economic development in trade and transport of goods, as in the sub-regional and regional integration throughout Central Africa.

**Keywords:** Issue, river exploration, penetration, colonization, competition.

### INTRODUCTION

The subcontinent of Africa, qualified Equatorial Africa was virtually an unknown region in the nineteenth century, except the coasts which was already being used by the famous Portuguese navigators during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This part of the continent has various natural geographical data among which we have the great Congo Basin which has an abundance of forest and water resources, which is high on the Congo River.

Indeed, it all started with the discovery of the river mouth in the fifteenth century by Diego the Portuguese naval officer in 1482. Thus, the discovery of the mouth of the Congo marked the beginning of the political history of the Congo. The Congo River a natural geographic feature is in the middle of the big political issues. The man would be at the center during the period of exploration, while there was colonization of Portuguese, French, and Belgium. Such issues are due to the special geographical position of the Congo River in this part of Central Africa. The history of Central Africa in general was formed around this great river which was a great challenge for Europeans after the river was identified as the major route of entry in the deepest part of Africa.

### Geopolitical Issues

The penetration of Central Africa by Europeans was not easy. It took enthusiasm and motivation on the part of explorers and adventurers often deemed as great travelers, animated by a conquering will. Few people lost interest, despite the disappearance of their predecessors And Central or Equatorial Africa remained. Therefore, it was an unknown region until 1874 when it was finally explored by Europeans who trotted the paths leading to the deepest part of Africa and the Congo River was one of the main pathways in the Africa. The Equatorial part of Africa was virtually an unknown region in the nineteenth century by Europeans; some cautious geographers have left a great white in this term: *earth incognito* 1 meaning unknown

land until 1874. This is because Africa has a latitude of 6 degrees and is found between 10 ° west longitude and 30 ° east longitude, it is this part of Africa that was mysterious to Europeans. Despite the discoveries made by the Portuguese dating from the fifteenth century and the *Five Weeks in a Balloon* by Jules Verne, the Middle part of Africa remained obscure. However, Europeans did not cease to show their growing interest in Africa especially those regions undiscovered, from where *expeditions were undertaken to obtain more specific information on the main geographical features of Africa*. Before 1850, the exploration of the interior of Africa possessed a century of history, but it was in 1855 that Albert Montemont explained in his travels in Africa *that part of Africa consist of blacks, Austria's, giraffes and hippos, scorching deserts and mysterious rivers* 3.

1. Robert (A) 1989 *In the footsteps of Stanley and Brazza*, Paris, Mercure de France, p. 17.
2. Mbokolo E. General History of Africa, *The Africa of the goal of the nineteenth century: problems and prospects* ems, p.27.
3. Jean (D), General History of Africa: *The Great Explorations of Africa de 1850 to today*, p.168.

These words are revealing and show that the most ignored areas in this period of the nineteenth century were the Sahara and equatorial Africa. The latter was to be penetrated by missionaries and scientific expeditions that Europeans were going to organize, discover and recognize this unknown region. Many facts discovered prepared the exploration of equatorial Africa. The penetration of this region was made possible by the presence of rivers and streams. In 1850, the first famous explorer of this region was David Livingstone's. These explorations were scientific and geographically perform. Thus the race to determine the sources of the main rivers of the continent and control of its average begin after this exploration. It was quite certain that the idea of penetrating equatorial Africa was likely a matter of putting the people of these areas immune to traffickers and purveyors of ebony wood.

This means that the scientific explorations seemed to be of a humanitarian nature, taking into account a number of books about the nature of some explorers like Livingstone and Brazza for his humanitarian peaceful ideas understood to stop trafficking "*first ensuring police inside the territories handed over to traffickers, who have every interest to maintain rivalries between local wrens* 4". Finally, scientific or geographical explorers of Central Africa went through the recognition of rivers in the region that of the west was tempted by Brazza. But these expeditions ended in failure during the first attempts due to the lightning attacks of alleged Apfourou who controlled the waters of the Alima, in bateke country. Only the way east was found practicable and it took: *quenching any essential event at the Stanley and Livingstone to sink into the darkness of equatorial Africa* 5. Indeed, Stanley discovered the Congo River and went along it. In March 12, 1877 he discovered the basin which was name after him "Stanley Pool upstream of Brazzaville" and he lifted the veil of the southern sources of the river.

In the late 1870s, the nature of African explorations took another turn. Through scientific research, the imperialist activities were passed and the rivalries of European powers in these areas were considered interesting by explorers

4. Chantal (E), 1992 *P. Savorgnan De Brazza 1852 to 1905, to the heart of the Africa to the source of major rivers from 1875 to 1877*, p11
5. Dumont (J) History General of Africa: *the great explorations of Africa de 1850 to today*, p.168.

So 1874-1885 Stanley and Brazza indulged in a competition that was to lead to the colonization of Central Africa.

### Geostrategic challenges

Discovering the path of equatorial Africa territory that has enormous biodiversity potential, the major powers engaged in conflicting relationships between them. These rivalries led to the sharing of central Africa in 1885 at the Berlin conference. Indeed Franco and Belgium rivalry embodied by Brazza Stanley and the first on behalf of France and the second on behalf of the African International Association of Leopold II and the intervention of Portugal were originally internationalization the problem of the Congo basin. The mission of West Africa which lasted only two years defined the methods and objectives of the French colonial policy. She took from its appearance, the appearance of an economic intervention since claimed he appears in 1883 .....*the primacy of economic problems on the strategic imperatives* 6. But gradually as the knowledge of the terrain became effective, explorations were no longer a priority, but instead they turned to the so-called policies, particularly on the huge waterway network of Congo. Thus, colonization took a political and competitive dimension. the mission of West Africa faced not only one competitor strength, AIC, but also two other, that is to say, the Teke and Boubangui, which in turn formed a couple very complex association and sometimes rival. Furthermore the mission was a natural extension of the second travel Brazza which was to ensure France a right of priority and occupation on the nearest point of the Atlantic or the Congo begins to be navigable. About the second Brazza Mission in its letter of 30 août 1879 mentions:

*I should mention the commercial importance and especially policy that will take the Gabon Ogooué and still unoccupied part of the coast that extends to Portuguese Angola. The European nation that has managed to take a position on the part of the coast or will the natural outlet of this huge line of communication will have a huge market to its business* 7

This is what justifies the economics of early ... and conquering policies following the mission. Immediately began creating stations saw that it was taking a position on the territories which had reported the commercial importance.

6. Goma Foutou, 1984 *Conferences and letters of De Brazza*, p.151

7. Catherine Coquery- Vidrovitch, 1963 *Brazza and taking possession of the Congo from 1883 to 1885*, p.11

The first station founded was Franceville which saw the deployment of the French flag in June 1880, this direction was provided by Mr. Noguez while Brazza himself went to the Congo.

Borrowing the waterway, Brazza met an envoy of Makoko and he writes: We follow the recently Lefini river and we had to build a raft, when a chief bearing the distinctive necklace vassals occurred to me: *Makoko said he had long known the great white head of Ogooué; he knows his terrible guns were never used in the attack, and that peace and abundance accompanies his steps. He asked me to bring you the word of peace and guide his friend* 8. During these expeditions, the terms of peace, freedom, prosperity had always accompanied the mission, which was to the next threatening operation to the habits and interests of these peoples, these tribes located from the Ogooué to Congo; because, starting with the creation of Franceville to meet the King Teke these terms veiled operating strategies. Brazza also writes: *Today, all the people of the lower Ogooué and Congo do not*

see the "piece of cloth" which is the flag indicative of a next-threatening operation for their inhabitants and their interests, but although the emblem of peace and freedom 9. It was under these very flattering connotations Brazza, burnt strongly to meet the King Teke. After two days of walking, he saw the horizon of a vast sheet of water whose silvery sheen would blend in the shadow of high mountains (or hills) and he said. *The Congo, the mysterious River leading Northeast, where he appeared as the horizon of a sea, flowed majestically at our feet, without the sleep of nature was disturbed by the sound of his quiet stream* 10.

Thus, it is in August 1880 for the first time before the great Congo River; actually this second mission Brazza made was of particular ambition; signing a treaty with the King Teke in order to occupy the right bank of the Congo River. Led by the envoy of King Makoko Mbé up residence there Brazza settled and remained twenty-five days to leave there with a treaty that it seems placed Makoko and states under French protection. In front of Brazza, there was a major rival; Stanley, who worked for the International Association of the Congo

8 .Goma Foutou, *1984 Conferences and letters of De Brazza*, p.151

9. Elikia Mbokolo, *resistors and messianism*, p. 60

Having interested in Stanley found that as architect of its policy, Leopold II recruits for new explorations. Stanley included the intentions and the determination of the King will *not: let slip a good opportunity to get a share in this magnificent cake africain*.<sup>11</sup> Concealing the intentions of his organization the International Association African he embodied, Leopold II prepared the second mission of Stanley in 1879. Also on the coasts of Congo under French and Portuguese surveillance, a mission of 215 members representing the AIA had managed to infiltrate the territory. Once on the ground they set themselves up as a kind of special power especially with the dissolution of Upper Congo Study Committee to replace with a more efficient, more active and having a more difficult task; one to occupy more territory, task was accomplishing Stanley. Secretly, Stanley was responsible for obtaining rights of sovereignty over the regions it would pass through. Indeed the Franco-Belgian mixed in Congo is due to a race that engages between Brazza on behalf of France and Stanley to that of Leopold II. This focused on a single region, one located on either side of the Congo River to Stanley Pool. Brazza Stanley had to overtake in the area, so he had the first signed a treaty with the King Teke 10septembre 1880 and October 3 of the same year, he obtained permission to occupy an area at the edge of the River Congo or it creates a station identified by a French tricolor flag on the right bank of the river.

Stanley side would also have received permission from the king to occupy the left bank of the River. Then the African International Association had also load Stanley to extend the influence on Belgian Congo Kouilou an axis. Thus Belgians stops by creating fictitious eight stations between Lower Kouilou and Manianga the Congo. Meanwhile Brazza had charged Cordier ship lieutenant to find at any price support on the coast points.

A real geostrategic challenge revealed was enhanced by thirst to acquire a colony. Brazza takes its outlet to the sea; the French are on the coast and in the basin, the Belgians in Niari. French success will displease everyone. The Portuguese feel dispossessed of the land they occupied informally. The English allies of the Portuguese see this access to East Africa region that they dominate, blocked by France. Belgians ousted the coast are turning to Germany all happy to again limit the French ambitions. Bismarck then a conference and it is the Berlin conference Novembre1884- February 1885 marks a turning point for the history of Africa.

10. Goma Foutou 10, 1984 *Brazza conferences and letters*, p. 151

11. Idem

### ECONOMIC ISSUES politico

The economic operating policy PS De Brazza was not designed at random, but rather it was due to the fact that he was on the ground. In contact with the people of Central Africa, he had the opportunity to know and study seriously all their routes and their economic activities. To determine their territories, their products, their needs, their lines of communication, Brazza maintained relationships with indigenous peoples. During his second mission, Brazza had to report the commercial importance and especially politics of this region from Gabon via the Ogooué to Angola (Cabinda). It was a position taken for economic purposes and Brazza's letter of 30 August 1879 had somehow his economic ideas. Instead of scientific exploration, he turned to the colonial conquest. Party of Gabon to enter the Congo Brazza implanted a first station in Franceville and hurried down to the Congo to meet King Teke. The treaty between Brazza and King Teke was the understanding of that a treaty of commerce. Moreover, the economic ideas of this explorer also masked a political intention that is to say the one to submit the territories for economic domination followed by political domination; deliver these vast regions in France. The policy of economic exploitation which kept Brazza support was not merely imagined, but was evident. It is true that historically these territories have what it takes to develop the economy; in addition it had to establish colonization, breaking the monopoly of other economic powers such as Portugal, thwart the progress and impact of International Association of the Congo. The September 10, 1880 by signing a trade treaty with King Teke, which treaty he changed the way of taking possession of the territories on behalf of France. Brazza and proves to be the one that prompted France, to establish economic and political domination in the region of Central Africa. A Brunswick say, *the personal authority to Brazza foundation for his passion for Africa and its land sake of the greatness of France. Both cardinals' attachments determine its choices in the objectives and methods of action, its resolution in any situation. In solitude he develops a personal vision of the development, expansion and defense of the Congo to the competing interests, with the constant concern and demanding the means employed. In solitude also, he formulated an analysis of the policy to the markets of the colony, providing a clean vision of spheres of influence, ensuring the interests of France.* 12

12. Brunswick (H), *Black Africa at the time of the French Empire*, p. 211

In the race to land use, Stanley Pool becomes an issue of major powers from 1880. Indeed Stanley Pool the economic importance dates back for centuries already in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the Portuguese stationed on the coast sent trusted slaves seeking ivory and captives at Stanley Pool. This is where the race for the possession of the territories finds its true meaning. The rivalry between Brazza and Stanley in the Congo Basin will be confined around the Stanley Pool, a model of the basin which will see the creation of Brazzaville on Ntamo area, specifically Ncuna a rather privileged location on the map political and economic. In this Brazza wrote: *The main results of our last exploration was the discovery of the only truly feasible route, the Niari that specifically led to our station Ntamo key of the lower Congo, concluding the treaty under which the King Makoko put this key in our hands* 13

All in all commercial traditions, the foundation of political power; political cohesion and traditional socio cultural should be replaced respectively by new business methods and

relations, and the establishment of colonial policy. Colonization in its different economic and political forms caused a political and economic dependence of indigenous peoples controlled by the colonial administration.

### The POLITICAL-ECONOMIC ISSUES NEW

The scramble for Africa took place at the Berlin Conference (November 1884-February 1885). The future borders of Central Africa and micro-states came into being. Indeed it is between Belgium and France on the one hand and Portugal on the other that was done sharing, a cornerstone was the recognition of the independent state of Congo. It took a determined border states. The river served as a natural border between the two states barely sketched that of the French Congo and Congo Leopold. In fact, the river Congo is part of what the trans boundary waters we agree to call that are not other than as *Ngody: water resources (such as rivers, lakes aquifers ...) that cross political boundaries of two or 14 more states*. And the governance of the Congo River is following the national interest.

The two states that share the river, each has its own program on the use of the river water. He Ya thereby a competition problem; reflecting further, there can really be tensions and disputes over the river, if common interests are not guaranteed.

13. Kinata (C), 2006, P. S De Brazza in Congo's history, exercise in history, p.5

14- Ngodi (S), the joint management of trans boundary waters of the Congo River, [http // www24-03-2012](http://www24-03-2012).

On the international character of the river, there have been times when the Zairean State currently DRC once expressed at the time a contempt for the most elementary rules of international law. To show its absolute sovereignty over the management of the Congo River which is nevertheless a common heritage in the portion that separates with his neighbor, Congo Brazzaville. This absolute sovereignty expressed by the former Zaire (now the DRC) was manifested in the words of the authorities of that country in 1972 on the chain of national radio, saying: *zaire river crosses one single country Zaire, and elsewhere even colonizers of yesterday, Belgians and French had agreed to entrust the responsibility of the river portion of markup that bathes the neighboring Republic of Congo. So much so that we were responsible for all boating accident occurring by mistake markup between Brazzaville and Ngombe*.<sup>15</sup> The current ex-Zaire DRC sovereignty has often violated the Congolese interests (Congo Brazzaville) who are born conflictual relations between the two countries. These conflicts are those of 1968 and 1969 characterized by acts of sabotage along the river between the two countries.

The very exasperated sense of sovereignty by the State of Zaire (DRC) has always been the basis of the diplomatic relations between the two countries. Unilateral religious disaffiliation of the international river Zaire River is the blatant expression of a river nationalism and this can complicate however sub-regional integration. The Congo River appears today as a natural resource to multiple challenges: economic, security, energy, social and geopolitical. Including multiple river navigation, the exchange of goods and energetic production. Both states build relationships in the context of exchanges is a natural way clear for the supply of agricultural products and food crops especially between the two capitals. This shows the importance of this river in the revitalization of the sub regional and regional integration; especially that the position of Brazzaville on the river navigation terminals makes it more convenient integration.

The integration sub regional and regional between different states benefiting from this trans boundary resource is made possible primarily by trade.

15-Emission captured in Brazzaville 7.30 21-11-1972, transcribed and stored in the Legal and Consular Affairs of MOFAT of Congo.

Unfortunately the relationship more or less competitive and suspicious between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo do not promote sub-regional integration which makes it even a more complicated regional integration. Transboundary water sharing inspires opportunity for disputes or conflicts of interest.

It is cooperation that can make a way possible to achieve better management of water resources but concerted management. Around the River arise several problems: environmental, navigation, pollution, endangered ecosystem, it should challenge more than one person to achieve the preservation policy and maintenance of natural resources. Projects, such as road-rail project are often encroached upon by national interests and programs; since the two neighbors closer unable to get along better and mutually depend on the Congo River. Regional integration is far from being effective.

### **The socio-cultural issues**

Humans differ in their languages, religions, and cultures that which has arisen rivalry throughout history. Those organized societies have developed rules identifying them. Colonial penetration in Central Africa introduced profound social and cultural changes due to large movements of political economic and cultural colonization. The Congo River was an inseparable element in these changes and reveals in its edges clues that cannot deceive. These people were refer to as Teke, Kongo and Boubangui taken as a sample of any mutations along the Congo River.

Indeed, contact between modernity and tradition would necessarily cause a long crisis that these companies could not meet without losing their basic structures. Under colonial penetration these companies are seen to be shared under foreign cultural identities, so that the two Congo were to be shared between the two powers, one French and one Belgium. However, Teke and Kongo companies spread to either side of the Congo River by ignorance and the other part was shared by Belgium and France on the other. The loss of identity of each of these companies was illustrated clearly when Western cultural lens was at its highest point having considered the traditional cultures as inferior compared to that of Europeans. From the beginning European had a superior attitude, the natives were still savages whom they brought the benefits of colonization *16*. When the two cultures came together, it necessarily resulted in acculturation which later began the passion of self-deprecation of the old colonized. Tribalism the derogatory term was the means by which the West were able to disqualify African cultures, even managing to share this attitude by Africans themselves and the company touched especially indigenous languages. The significant that the language had become shameful in their very eyes was significant enough to feel the need of being more civilized. Therefore, the inability to know oneself denigrates not only what we represent, but above the others. Thus the Teke of both sides of the banks of the Congo lost their original culture to the French and Belgian competitors. The loss of cultural identity is usually accompanied with that of the linguistic value; language is the important symbol of identification of cultural areas. Also a new cultural area characterized by the Lingala language that had rapidly spread through the river trade was to supplant another

as kiteke and Kikongo. The Congo River unites both people's languages and enough common social conceptions. The river has never been seen as a physical barrier to the people, the cultural unit sees daily through the art of music and literature of the two countries.

16-Coquery- Vidrovitch, *Brazza and the possession of the Congo*, p.16

## CONCLUSION

European penetration into the virtually unknown region of Central Africa followed the tracks of slave traffickers and most especially through the waterways, of which the most important were the Ogoue from West and Central Africa the Congo River from the east. The water's was the main channel for full penetration of Central Africa after years of mystery and failed attempts. The sense of adventure and passion for discovery reinforced by scientific and geographical research and developments that occurred during this period after slave trade was characterized by political and economic revival of the African States. Direct contact between the European colonial powers and African societies, was making Central Africa a stake among these great powers competing around the River which played a leading role in the future of this region. It was that which explains the competition that started between France and Belgium Leopoldian after the Anglo-American explorer Stanley had identified the importance of this great river in Africa. The most important lesson is that the river plays a vital role in the socio-cultural unity in the valuation of linguistic cultures preserving them in a world dominated by global civilization.

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