

The Dynamics of Inequality in the Congolese Copperbelt

A Discussion of Bourdieu's Theory of Social Space

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Few Congolese people would acknowledge the existence of social classes in their own country. The categories that they use in everyday life (the 'unemployed', 'intellectuals', 'villagers' or 'whites', to give but a few examples) are based on different criteria of classification, ambiguous and ill-defined; for that reason, they cannot easily be matched with social classes. All would however acknowledge the existence of strong inequalities in Congolese society. So how can we account for these inequalities and their evolution since Congo's independence in 1960? In order to do so, a vast literature suggests starting from an a priori definition of class-in-itself (the political class, the working class, or more recently, the middle class), and then to study its formation, its interests, its conflicts and the forms of consciousness associated with it. This line of enquiry, however, is confronted by two longstanding issues in class analysis: to determine the boundaries of social classes (who belong to the class under study?), and to think the relationship between class-in-itself and class-for-itself (what is the relevance of class from people's point of view?).

This chapter argues that to account for the evolution of inequalities in Congo since independence, the theoretical framework developed by Bourdieu in *Distinction* (1979) offers a better starting point. It allows one not only to overcome the two above-mentioned difficulties faced by traditional class analysis, but also to study the dynamics of class in a broader perspective – beyond the usual emphasis on the formation of a particular class. In a nutshell, Bourdieu sees 'social classes' as emic categories that

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result from the re-presentation work of cultural entrepreneurs and people's acts of classification in everyday life. Such categories are not purely arbitrary: they are based on perceived discrepancies in lifestyles – that is, ways of talking, eating, dressing, and so on; and these lifestyles, just like the practical schemas through which they are perceived, are the product of certain living conditions. In a society like France, living conditions show deep inequalities that Bourdieu proposes to objectify (and measure) under the form of three species of power, or capital: economic, cultural and social capital. French society is thus represented not as a single hierarchy of socio-economic classes, but as a continuous and multidimensional space – what he calls the 'social space', or 'space of social positions'.

For Bourdieu, in other words, there is no class in itself that people would become conscious of, and/or that the social scientist could take as a research subject a priori. It is people and institutions that draw symbolic boundaries between social categories. At most, it is possible, on the basis of the distribution of the different forms of capital, to delineate some 'theoretical regions', or 'classes on paper', in order to account for probable symbolic associations and divisions between people.¹ However, Bourdieu (1984: 4) reminds us, the symbolic association of those who are close in the social space (that is, in terms of economic, cultural and social capital) is never necessary, and the symbolic association of those distant never impossible. Indeed, the social space can be perceived and represented according to other principles of division than class, such as regional or national identity for instance.

Since its publication, *Distinction* (1979) has given rise to intense debate among sociologists, and stimulated further research, to the point that it has rapidly become the most cited book in the social sciences. The discussion, however, has to a large extent been limited to France and the United States (see especially Lamont and Lareau 1988, Lamont 1992, Lamont 2000, Lahire 2004, Coulangeon 2004, 2011). With few exceptions (Hilgers 2009), Bourdieu's theoretical framework has not sparked much interest in African studies. In addition, it is the prominent role that Bourdieu attributes to culture that has attracted the greatest attention. Most researchers have focused on the social distribution of cultural practices, and their implication in processes of boundary formation. By contrast, this chapter pays more attention to the theory of social classes found in *Distinction* (1979: chap. 2; see also Bourdieu 1984, 1993), which constitutes the foundation of Bourdieu's sociology of cultural practices. The discussion below will be limited to this first step of analysis – the mapping of the social space, and of the trajectories of socio-professional groups; for reasons of space, it will not go further into the details of consumption and boundary-marking practices.²

Bourdieu's theory of social space shows two main limitations. Built on the analogy of the economy, it reduces things, knowledge and relationships to forms of 'capital', in which people 'invest' to make 'profits' on different 'markets' (Graeber 2001: chap.1). Since it conceptualizes the social space as structured by only three forms of capital, it fails to account for variations between individuals, including within the same family (Lahire 1995, 2004). In my view, these limitations, although important, do not invalidate Bourdieu's theory to solve the problem of class analysis. As Passeron (1982, see also 1991) argues, the sociological mode of analysis is to a large extent founded on analogical reasoning, and the analogy of the economy is – within certain limits – analytically productive for studying non-economic processes like the so-called 'inflation' of educational titles. Bourdieu acknowledges that, to draw a detailed map of social positions and account for variations between individual trajectories, the analysis should take into consideration other factors, including gender, age, health, religion, ethnicity, place of residence, etc. In his view, however, these social characteristics are related, and secondary, to the volume and distribution of economic, cultural and social capital – the most determining factors of living conditions. It is therefore legitimate (and productive) to take these three key variables as a basis for studying the transformations of the social space, and the trajectories of socio-professional groups within it.

This chapter takes Bourdieu's theory of social space as a basis for reconstructing the dynamics of inequality in a society very different from France – namely the industrial and urban region of Katanga, in the Democratic Republic of Congo.³ After having discussed the relevance of thinking of this region as a social space structured by the three main forms of capital identified by Bourdieu, I will focus on the trajectories of two categories of people within this particular social space: white businessmen, whom I interviewed during my doctoral research in 2002–2004 (Rubbers 2009), and Gécamines workers, with whom I lived in the course of several fieldtrips between 2006 and 2011 (Rubbers 2013). These case studies will provide the opportunity to compare their strategies of social mobility in the face of the powerful changes that have affected Katanga in the postcolonial period, and to reflect more broadly on the changing significance of economic, cultural and social capital in the structuring of inequalities in Africa.⁴

The Congolese Copperbelt as a Social Space

The choice to limit the analysis to the industrial and urban region of Katanga (or Congolese copperbelt) can be justified by its main characteristic features: (a) It has been dominated throughout the twentieth century by a single mining company, the Union Minière du Haut-Katanga, subsequently nationalized and renamed as Générale des Carrières et des Mines (Gécamines); (b) a large number of its inhabitants have lived in town for several generations, and have to a large extent broken their rural ties; and (c) wage work has been historically important in the region; even today, it remains the main source of income for a significant proportion of the population.⁵ One last feature could be added to the list: the presence of a powerful white minority, who has played a key role in the emergence of regional identity politics in the colonial period. As many observers have noted, all this tends to make Katanga a distinctive place, closer to southern Africa than the rest of Congo.

Several authors have sought to identify the classes that divide Congolese society on the basis of their position in the national political economy (Nzongola 1970, Schatzberg 1980, Callaghy 1984, Young and Turner 1985, MacGaffey 1987). They did not necessarily agree on the number of classes, their boundaries, and the criteria to be taken into account in order to distinguish them but all assumed that Congolese society was composed of classes, and that their relationship reflected the dynamics of an economy in the periphery of the capitalist system. The theory of social space, I think, provides analytical tools for developing a more complex understanding of the dynamics of inequalities in that society: as mentioned above, it invites us to study these dynamics as resulting not from relations of production, but from the volume and distribution of three forms of capital among different socio-professional groups. Before retracing the trajectories of two such groups, I would like to briefly study variations in the relative weight of economic, cultural and social capital in the Congolese copperbelt since 1960.

In his theoretical statements, Bourdieu argues that building a theory of social classes implies breaking with the narrow economic approach of Marxism, which tends to reduce class to a position in relations of production. In his study of France, however, economic capital is given the greatest importance: in the last instance, cultural practices are understood as reflecting distance/proximity with the experience of material necessity. The problem is that the concept of economic capital is itself largely under-theorized. As Burawoy and Von Holdt argue (2012: chap. 2), the sociology of Bourdieu lacks a theory of capitalism that would account for

the accumulation of economic capital, changes in material living conditions, and dynamics of inequality.⁶ The neo-Marxist approach advocated in studies on Congolese classes in the 1970s and 1980s was more satisfactory in that respect (see MacGaffey 1987: chap.1).

In line with this latter approach, one can retrace the dynamics of inequality in Katanga since 1960 by taking as a point of departure the main forces shaping this region's political economy. In the first place, this economy is strongly dependent on the mining industry and the fluctuations of the copper price on the world market. The slow decrease of the copper price from 1974 to 2004 led to the bankruptcy of Gécamines, the decline of most industrial and commercial activities, and the general impoverishment of the population. During the last decade, the mining boom was followed by a rise in living standards, albeit quite unevenly across society. Secondly, the state faced an informal privatization process that made 'corruption' in the broad sense of the word into a major instrument of economic capital accumulation. In such a context, opportunities for enrichment are closely associated with the occupation of a strategic position in the state apparatus and/or the possibility to benefit from the support of people in such a position – what Bourdieu (1994: 33–34) called, in a conference on the social space of soviet countries, 'political capital', or 'social capital of a political type'. Finally, due to economic decline and state predation, Congolese people experienced an exponential rise in inflation that gradually eroded real wages, especially in the public sector. This process contributed to an unprecedented growth of informal activities in urban areas. Most people in Katanga came to participate in this economy, but only a few managed to make sufficient profits to develop their business and accumulate economic capital.

In comparison to economic capital, the concept of cultural capital, grounded in Bourdieu's theory of habitus and cultural legitimacy, is more explicit. The theory of cultural legitimacy has been principally criticized for overestimating bourgeois culture's symbolic domination over the whole society, and therefore ignoring the multiplicity of social identifications, and the heterogeneity of cultural tastes (Lamont and Lareau 1988, Grignon and Passeron 1989, Hall 1992, Lahire 2004). This critique, made for France and the United States, is justified for Katanga as well. Since the late nineteenth century, this industrial and urban region has attracted migrants of different backgrounds, and been subjected to various cultural influences. Appropriated in original ways, these influences have given birth to cultural practices (habits, lifestyles and forms of artistic expression) that cannot be reduced to mimicry of the whites.

I would nevertheless argue that Bourdieu's broad argument is relevant for studying Katanga, where the cultural influence of colonial institutions

has been particularly strong and lasting. In this region, the state, large companies and Christian missions have successfully imposed Western 'modernity' as a dominant cultural repertoire that Congolese people came to view as a major source of symbolic power. As Ferguson (1999: 108) puts it, 'it should not be obscured that, *de facto*, cosmopolitan styles in urban Africa are dominated by Western and Western-derived cultural forms; and that such cultural domination is hardly an accident'. Since independence, the cultural influence of colonization has been challenged by the cultural policy of the Mobutu regime; the collapse of the economy; the multiplication of schools, churches and media; and, more recently, the establishment of new mining investors. Even though the colonial version of 'modernity' has been continuously challenged, it has remained a privileged reference order in the local economy of distinction. As the case studies show, symbolic struggles in this urban society can hardly be understood without going back to the Belgian colonial legacy and to the cultural influence of the 'West' in general.

A good indication of this is of course school education, which continues to be viewed as crucial despite the very limited number of job opportunities. In the 1960s, the education system was an important channel of upward social mobility. However, the rise of demand for education that followed rapidly caused a devaluation of the values of school degrees on the market, an increase in the duration of studies, and the creation of numerous private schools, ranked according to their location, the amount of registration fees, and their reputation. This is a process very similar to that described by Bourdieu (1979) and Passeron (1982) for France. The main difference lies in the fact that, in Congo, the growing dependence of public schools on the fees paid by parents and the concomitant multiplication of private schools have completely altered the relative importance of cultural and economic capital in the access to recognized institutions: it is above all necessary to have money and/or support to get a (good) school education. Despite adverse conditions, the demand for school and university education has not declined since the 1970s (Rubbers 2003, De Herdt et al. 2010). The main reason for this is that to obtain an academic degree continues to be conceived by the majority of Congolese people as a source of prestige, the best means of getting a (good) job, and the most secure form of investment for the future of children.

Social capital is not more theorized than economic capital in the work of Bourdieu. Although it is mentioned in *Distinction* (1979), it is not used for mapping the French social space; the latter is only represented by a two-dimensional graphic. Later, Bourdieu (1980, 1986, 1994) discussed social capital in brief notes or passages, but only to treat it as a secondary variable, that allows for turning other forms of capital to good account. In

his view, social capital is of lesser importance in 'advanced' societies – an unsubstantiated view that ignores variations between countries and sectors of social life.

It is unclear whether Bourdieu would have regarded contemporary Katanga – an industrial and urban area for a century – as a fully-fledged 'advanced' society or not.⁷ Nevertheless, as my earlier discussion of the role of economic and cultural capital suggests, social capital is certainly key to understand the dynamics of inequality in that society. If, as Bourdieu (1980: 2) claims, the concept of social capital is above all intended to account for cases where individuals earn a different return on an equivalent economic or cultural capital, then it is necessary to use it in most circumstances. Whether for getting a job, developing economic activities, or getting access to public services, personal relationships play a crucial role – albeit in different ways – in Katanga.

This allegedly strong influence of social capital in Katanga raises both methodological and theoretical difficulties. This form of power is of course more difficult to measure than economic or cultural capital. The successive household surveys carried out in Lubumbashi (the capital city of Katanga) since 1958 provide information on levels of income and education, but not on the size and composition of social networks (Benoît 1958, Houyoux and Lecoanet 1975, Bruneau and Pain 1990, Petit 2003, Nkuku Khonde and Remon 2006). It is consequently impossible to precisely assess the relative weight of social capital in the (re-)production of inequalities in this city since 1960. Yet, if social capital is important (and I believe it is), then the theoretical representation of social space that Bourdieu proposed on the basis of the French case – a space divided in classes and class fractions, each developing a specific habitus and cultural lifestyle – needs to be made more complex. On the one hand, social capital blurs the probable effects of the economic and cultural capital inherited from parents on children's dispositions, practices and trajectories. On the other, it is not in any simple way determined by proximity in the social space or, to put it differently, correlated to the volume and distribution of economic and cultural capital. To study the dynamics of inequality in Katanga, we need therefore to pay more attention to the interplay of social capital with economic and cultural capital. This is what the two following case studies illustrate.

White Businessmen

In my doctoral research, I studied the trajectory of white businessmen who were dominating the most important economic sectors (mining,

import trade and construction) in the early 2000s (see Rubbers 2009). Even though some had migrated to central Africa after 1960, most were born in families of Belgian, Greek or Italian origins established in the area for two or three generations. They were part of a white population that sharply declined from 14,000 in 1960 to less than 1,500 in 2001 – these figures are for Katanga province alone.⁸

White businessmen have been directly touched by the events that marked the postcolonial history of Congo-Zaire: the rebellions and wars that followed Congo's independence, and Katanga's secession, from 1960 to 1963; the nationalization of foreign companies in 1973; and the looting of factories and shops by the army and the population in 1991. They were also, at a more general level, affected by the bankruptcy of Gécamines, the extension of the informal economy, and the growing poverty of the population. These changes nonetheless offered to some new opportunities in return: some small building contractors could get public contracts previously granted to major construction companies; some retail traders formerly established in rural areas could move into wholesale trade and industrial transformation in town; and some earthworks companies working for Gécamines managed to become the latter's partner in joint venture projects and enter in the mining business. From 1960 to now, an ever decreasing number of European entrepreneurs succeeded to develop their activities on the ruins of the industrial and commercial base inherited from the past.

This can be briefly illustrated by the trajectories of the two most important businessmen in Katanga, George Forrest and Georges Psaromatis. In 1986, soon after he became the managing director of the *Entreprise Générale Malta Forrest (EGMF)*, a family company with a long experience in the construction of buildings and roads, Forrest managed to obtain subcontracting contracts with Gécamines for earthworks. After the collapse of the state mining company in the early 1990s, however, he started to invest in other sectors and countries. This extraversion strategy later allowed him to come back in the Congolese mining sector with a stronger negotiation position. From 1994 onwards, Forrest succeeded in attracting major companies to sign partnership agreements with both Gécamines and EGMF, and develop together several mining projects. In the early 2000s – before the arrival of more important investors – EGMF had replaced Gécamines as the leading company in the Congolese mining sector. Through other companies, Forrest had also managed to develop operations in a dozen other sectors in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. The family business of the 1980s had turned into a multinational group.

Psaromatis began his career as a retailer in the small town of Kalemie. After the nationalization of foreign companies in 1973, he moved to

Lubumbashi and followed other Greek merchants in the food import trade. During the looting of 1991, all of them lost the bulk of their goods. To face the situation, Psaromatis managed to obtain new goods on credit from suppliers in Southern Africa – many of them traders of Greek origins, with long-lasting connections to the Greek diaspora in Central and South Africa. Thanks to this support, he gained a position of virtual monopoly, and made very high profits. In the years that followed, he strengthened this comparative advantage by opening a purchasing office in South Africa, developing his political connections, and granting goods on credit to local retailers. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, he also increased the number of cold-storage rooms and shops, built small processing units, and took over an oil distribution company. Up to the present day, this strategy has allowed the Greek businessman to face the growing competition of Indian, Chinese and South African importers.

The economic upward mobility of businessmen such as Forrest or Psaromatis in the postcolonial period came with a redrawing of hierarchies within the white minority and of the boundary demarcating it from Congolese society. In the colonial period, most non-Belgian settlers in Katanga were Italians from Piedmont, Greeks and Jews from the Dodecanese, or Portuguese. Generally poor with little school education, they were regarded with contempt by the Belgian establishment, as they could undermine white prestige and blur the racial order on which colonial rule was founded. Inside their own communities, since they came from the same social milieu, migrated to Congo to make a fortune, and often operated in the same sector, these settlers were competing on essentially economic grounds. It was not until the 1950s that the most successful among them began to learn French, to put their children in Belgian schools, to give their daughters in marriage to Belgians, and to apply for Belgian citizenship.

After independence, the situation progressively reversed. With the departure of colonial administrators, company managers and employees, businessmen came to hold a dominant position in the white minority. At the time of my fieldwork in the early 2000s, they were not only the principal employer for Europeans living in Katanga, but also the main source of funding for social institutions catering to the latter (schools, hospitals, recreational clubs, etc.). In these circumstances, it is no surprise that cultural capital has to a large extent given way to economic capital as the main principle of symbolic distinction among whites: it turns around houses, cars, mobile phones, holiday destinations, dinner invitations, parties and the size of domestic staff. Whereas the signals marking distinctions among whites were principally culturally acquired ones in the colonial period, they have become increasingly purchasable ones since the 1970s.

Access to goods and services is now deemed more important than education or connoisseurship. In these circumstances, it is not the non-Belgian trader with a poor school education that is marginalized from the white community, but anyone unable to afford a certain living standard. Here is for instance the story of a Belgian university graduate, who saw his children progressively ostracized after the family moved into a flat:

Parents don't want their kids to come and play with ours anymore because we live in a flat: 'they don't have a garden', 'they don't have a swimming pool', 'they don't want a nanny', and so, 'what are my kids going to do at their place, in a flat?' There are not many kids who come and spend the afternoon playing with my daughter or my son.

This growing importance of economic capital must be understood in the light of white businessmen's social background: they grew up in migrant communities entirely dedicated to business that gave limited value to schooling. It must also be understood in the light of the evolution of race relations. Since school and university education is now accessible to many Congolese people, it has lost much of its symbolic power from Europeans' point of view – unless it is provided by expensive and exclusive institutions abroad. At the same time, regardless of the sector, white businessmen continue to be in a dominant position, and white workers continue to earn much higher wages than nationals with the same qualification. Only money now allows the Europeans to preserve their relative social rarity. Practices of social distinction are now primarily based on economic capital (money), not on cultural capital (school education), and put the great majority of Congolese people at some distance: obviously most Congolese people cannot afford to buy a villa, to put children in a consular school, to join expatriate social clubs, and to take holidays in Europe. This redefinition of the racial boundary has involved a tighter social control over whites' own standard of living. To adopt practices accessible to most Congolese people is quickly subjected to disapproving comments and derogatory comments that have the effect of making expatriates hold their position as whites: 'when I bought my bike here', a woman who arrived from Greece in the 1990s told me, 'the entire Greek community was shocked: a Greek woman cannot cycle here; she must move around by car because bikes are for the Blacks'.⁹

Whether based on economic or cultural capital, the symbolic distinction of the white community is not completely alien or illegitimate to Congolese people for they use similar signals to make distinctions among themselves, and closely associate them with whiteness. The tautology used in local Swahili for modernity – '*kizungu bazungu*', literally the 'Europeans' European way of life' – is a clear indication of

this. In accordance with this symbolic proximity between race and class, whites tend to be seen a priori as rich, educated and high-status. In the same way, Congolese people with a 'modern' lifestyle (rich, educated and high-status) can be referred to as whites (or '*bazungu*') by the poor. Having said this, race is not entirely synonymous with class for it is also based on moral boundaries: whites are usually seen by both European and Congolese people as better organized and more trustworthy. In addition, it is not all white/Western culture that is regarded as more legitimate or high-status. In relation to food, music, religion or family life, for example, Congolese people tend to have relatively autonomous cultural preferences. As explained above, Western culture's symbolic domination should not be overestimated.

Since independence, the fall in the number of expatriates, their aggregation around a limited number of institutions, and their concern to reproduce the colour bar contributed to their integration in a very dense social network. Clearly this social capital provides them with economic advantages: those entering active life can mobilize it to find employment, to take over a business, or to get goods on credit; as for those already in business, it gives them the opportunity to make deals with a relatively trustworthy partners, provided that they know their partners personally, and that they can exert social pressure on them. This form of trust is not to be neglected in a context marked by the weakness of formal institutions (see Rubbers 2009). It is nevertheless a factor of secondary importance to account for white businessmen' relative success in comparison to Congolese competitors. Independently of their business acumen, their success derives to a large extent from their privileged access to capital abroad: it is above all their contacts with traders or mining companies abroad that allowed businessmen like Forrest or Psaromatis to gain a dominant position in the Congolese market. In comparison, for lack of credibility and/or connections, Congolese businessmen have much more difficulties in attracting capital, or to obtaining goods on credit, from foreign partners.

Gécamines Workers

From 2006 to 2011, I conducted ethnographic research in Likasi with Gécamines workers who were made redundant from the company in 2003–2004 within the framework of a voluntary departure programme (VDP) designed by the World Bank (Rubbers 2013).¹⁰ This generation of workers started their career at the company in the late 1950s and early 1960s. At that time, the social policy that Union Minière had put in place

from the late 1920s onwards offered significant benefits to them. Provided that they agreed to live under the disciplinary regime in the company's camps, they could take advantage of its comprehensive social infrastructure, and provide a certain material security to their wife and children (food, health, education, etc.). For this reason, they represented a relatively protected category in Congolese society.

This generation of workers has experienced a long and progressive decline of its living conditions in the postcolonial period. From the 1970s onwards, following the decrease of copper prices, Gécamines let their real wages devalue because of inflation. In the early 1990s, the company fell into bankruptcy, abandoned its social infrastructure, and ceased to distribute benefits to its personnel. Finally, in the context of the war between 1998 and 2003, workers began to receive their wages irregularly. In 2002, just before the VDP, they had on average thirty-six months of wage arrears. According to a survey conducted at that time (University of Lubumbashi 2005: 8–20), their standard of living was then lower than the rest of Katanga's urban population. Retrospectively, the only advantage that they obtained from their employer to face the deterioration of their living conditions was the opportunity to buy back the company houses they occupied in the late 1980s. This property subsequently protected them against an even more dramatic fall.

This collective downward spiral conceals disparities between different categories of employees, particularly managers and workers (see Rubbers 2017). It is therefore useful to come back in more detail to the economic, cultural and social strategies that they developed to face the decline of their living conditions. In the aftermath of independence, the company began to nationalize its staff.¹¹ During a brief period, this policy was of most benefit to skilled workers, who could obtain a promotion in the company hierarchy. Subsequently Gécamines gave preference to university and college graduates recruited externally instead. Those who could get access to a managerial position lived in another neighbourhood, and enjoyed a much higher living standard: a garden villa, a car, domestic workers, and so on. In a sense Gécamines did not bridge the economic, cultural and social gap that existed between European managers and Congolese workers in the colonial period. The Africanization of personnel simply consisted in granting to the new Congolese managers the benefits formerly reserved for whites.

Following the decline of Gécamines, the social distance between managers and workers was put into question. The living standard of employees came to depend less and less on their position in the company hierarchy, and more and more on the informal activities that they developed on the side with their wife and children (agriculture, petty

trade, poultry farming, etc.). Managers often found it harder to engage in such activities because they were less accustomed to manual work, and had a social status to uphold. In the 1990s, their total income could be, for that reason, lower than that of workers. Managers nevertheless found themselves in a better position after the VDP in 2003–2004. They received a severance payment (between US\$8,000 and 15,000), significantly higher than that of workers (between US\$2,000 and 4,000), that allowed them to invest in real estate. They could also move into the cottage for domestic workers in their garden, and rent their own house to an expatriate family – an opportunity inaccessible to workers, who lived in small houses in a former work camp on the outskirts of the city.

This is the decision that Kalombo, a former Gécamines manager in his seventies, took after having invested in a cooperative, a bread oven, a small shop in front of his house, and the cultivation of a plot of land. Although some of these activities keep going, the income that they generate is not sufficient for Kalombo to make a living. Part of the money that Kalombo received as severance payment was also shared with his adult children to give them the opportunity to complete their studies and move abroad: one now practices as a doctor in Canada, and four are employed by private companies in South Africa. These children send him some money in case of emergencies, but not for ordinary expenditures. Consequently Kalombo and his wife decided to move in the cottage and to rent their house for US\$700/month to an Indian family: 'I thought that I should be autonomous, and to be autonomous, I had to rent the house and put myself in here. As I only have two dependent children now, it's easier.'

As this case shows, another reason for which managers became better off than workers in the 2000s is that some of their children came to enjoy a more comfortable situation that allowed them to financially support their parents. Even though this support is generally small and/or irregular, it is critically important in difficult circumstances, whether it is for facing health problems, paying school fees, or recapitalizing a small business. The reasons that the children of managers came to enjoy a more comfortable situation in the 2000s are complex. Like the children of Kalombo, many received money from their father after the VDP to leave the country, and succeeded in getting a job or developing a business abroad. In addition, the children of managers were more likely than those of workers to continue their education in a graduate school or at university, and accordingly found themselves in a more favourable position to get a job when new opportunities opened up in the context of the mining boom. To study in a higher education institution gave them access not only to a degree, but also to a social capital independent from the one that they

acquired in Gécamines' townships. Both are of crucial importance to get a job in Congo (Rubbers 2003, 2004).

The children of workers did not have the same opportunities. Take the example of Makumbi's children. After having repaid his debts and bought a field, this seventy-year-old former trainer gathered his eleven adult children to share the remainder of his severance payment (US\$3000) among them. Needless to say, the amount of money that they received (approximately US\$100) could only be used for ordinary expenses, not for investing in a business or financing a trip abroad. In return, Makumbi asked them to assist him in the payment of school fees for the three remaining dependent children. Since then, however, he has not received anything: 'Not even a pen or a notebook. If I had not bought this field, where would I be today? I have been disappointed by my children; I'm disappointed up to the present day.' In their defence, it must be pointed out that none of his children had the opportunity to study beyond secondary school and get a stable job. All struggle to make a living in farming, small businesses or artisanal mining.

To understand this broad contrast between managers' and workers' children, it is necessary to come back to their unequal access to the educational system in the heyday of Gécamines. Until the 1980s, both Gécamines managers and workers prepared their children to pursue a career in the company and, if possible, to rise in the occupational hierarchy. The opportunities to advance to managerial positions, however, were profoundly unequal. Managers' children were prepared to become managers too, and benefited from various advantages in order to do so: they had guaranteed access to the company's secondary schools and technical colleges; they could study in their own bedroom, and did not have to participate to the housekeeping; and they regularly spoke French at home. Workers' children did not enjoy such favourable conditions. As they grew up in crowded houses, they were expected to assist their parents from an early age, and to start working at the end of primary school, or at the end of training school¹² (three years). In addition, the spoken language at home was usually Swahili. As a result, only a minority continued their secondary and post-secondary studies, usually thanks to the support of some teachers.

From the 1980s onwards, however, the decline of Gécamines gradually pushed workers to encourage their children to continue their school education and to find employment elsewhere. This was made possible by the creation of numerous private schools in the same period. Although more expensive, these schools offered worker households the opportunity to circumvent the company's discriminatory school system. Generally speaking, workers came to give increasing importance to

school education. Today, they consider it as the only form of ‘capital’ that they can pass on to their children, and the only ‘bargaining chip’ that they have to ask for their assistance later. Much more than that, they expect that school education will teach a sense of discipline, arouse children’s desire to progress in life, and open their mind to the modern world. This latter discourse on the school’s moral mission became more and more widespread in the 1990s and 2000s, when Gécamines workers began to experience growing difficulties in paying school fees. The growing number of school drop-outs in that period caused what my informants consider as a profound moral crisis. Tommy, a young man who worked as an artisanal miner before returning to school, explains that a ‘wall of incomprehension’ has emerged between some school drop-outs and those who continue to study like him:

In the past, we could study normally, we could eat normally. If we had to eat, we could eat. If we had to do something for the benefit of human kind, we did it. But since then, with the collapse of Gécamines, all has changed really. As people don’t study normally, one can see young children not wanting to study: they prefer to look for money. Girls don’t want to resume their studies. They prostitute themselves. ... For boys, it is bizarre too. They don’t want to hear about the studies. They don’t want anymore. For them, it is only about having money, getting drunk, that’s all. Most don’t even have a vision about becoming better-off in the future. They became narrow-minded: they only look for something to eat, dress, and that’s all. Yet a human being must normally have a project so that one day, he may become someone in society. But these guys, what society forbids is what they do. They call university graduates ‘fools’: ‘No, they can even make three months without getting anything’. They often say: ‘Many people have studied here but up to now, they have nothing, no house, nothing’. So it’s better for us to be wary. Instead of being together with them, it’s better to make a break. We really split. They can do what they want, and we also, we do what we want.

This moral crisis calls into question the norms and values inherited from the company since the colonial period. Within the framework of its stabilization policy from the 1920s onwards, the Union Minière attempted to instil in workers, their wives and children a whole series of norms and values related to the body (nutrition, conduct, dress, etc.), work (time, productivity, progress, etc.), and the family (monogamy, domesticity, savings, etc.). This cultural policy led in company townships to the emergence of an economy of distinction based on the mastery of ‘modernity’, allowing the most educated employees to consider themselves as ‘*évolués*’ (civilized), and to look down on the ‘*basses classes*’ – the lowest categories of workers. Following the decline of Gécamines, it became increasingly difficult for employees to participate in this economy of distinction:

everyone, including managers, was forced to reduce his/her living standard. The upward symbolic competition of the past even changed direction, to give place to a levelling down process through which managers began to imitate workers – to farm, to speak local Swahili, to wear second-hand clothes, and so on. In the 1990s, the 'trickle-down effect' of social distinction was working in reverse. Still, 'modernity' as a symbolic system continued to be struggled for, and remained a key repertoire of social distinction. A striking instance of this is provided by the great efforts that Gécamines households make during the holiday season to buy new clothes, decorate their homes and serve 'European' dishes to guests.

At the same time children dropping out from school began to elaborate a lifestyle which challenged the norms and values once promoted by the company, the Catholic Church and the school. For many, the '*voyou*' among artisanal miners is this counter-culture personified: he speaks a popular slang; he dresses like musicians; he spends his money on alcohol, drugs and prostitutes; and he overtly make fun of school graduates, church goers and even elders. This oppositional culture shows many similarities with that of British working-class children described by Willis (1978), including the rejection of school education, the importance of money, conspicuous consumption, the centrality of the peer group, an active and open sexuality, and opposition to any form of authority. Unlike the culture of the 'lads' in Britain, however, the counter-culture of Congolese artisanal miners does not derive from that of their fathers in the workplace; it has been largely developed in opposition to the norms and values inherited from – and embodied by – their father. It is better understood as a youth culture than as a working-class culture.

As such, the lifestyle of these young miners is best interpreted relationally as resulting from a 'dominated search for distinction', that consists in openly claiming for oneself what is stigmatized by dominant culture (Bourdieu 2001: 140). In doing so, they express their deep ambivalence towards the 'modernity' to which their parents aspired – a culture that they have been taught since childhood, but to which they do not have access anymore. It is this ambivalence that gives their cultural practices a 'postmodern' dimension – by which I mean here altogether posterior, alternative and apparently opposite to the modernity promoted by the company and embodied by their parents.

Secondly, contrary to the culture of British working-class children, the youth culture of artisanal miners does not lead them to get working-class jobs, and reproduce the social position of their father, but to live from a precarious informal activity, and experience a downward economic trajectory. They not only have a lower income than their parents, but as they are progressively chased from the most accessible mines by foreign

companies, they are also condemned to give up artisanal mining sooner or later, and find other, less profitable, sources of income.

Thirdly, since this youth culture gives more symbolic weight to economic than to cultural capital, it points at a progressive change in the legitimate forms of distinction in Gécamines townships. In these townships, economic disparities have historically been low so that more importance was given to cultural capital. Today, most inhabitants live from informal activities, and new economic inequalities have emerged among them. Economic capital has accordingly become more salient in their everyday practices of distinction than in the past.

Although it is not limited to Gécamines townships, this youth culture is of special significance in these areas not only because it opposes the norms and values previously promoted by the company, but also because opportunities of social mobility through school education and formal employment have become particularly limited for Gécamines employees and their children. The main reason for this is that their social capital is to a large extent confined to the company's social world: the Union Minière, and then the Gécamines, gave priority to its employees' children and relatives for recruitments, built townships equipped with all the necessary infrastructure to take charge of all the aspects of their existence, and took measures to limit, and control, their contacts with relatives and friends outside. This paternalistic policy led to make its employees' social network limited, dense and multiplex. All my informants in Likasi had spent most of their life in the company's townships. Most of their parents, parents-in-law, friends, neighbours, brothers and sisters in Christ, and so on, were also (former) Gécamines employees. And their contacts with more distant relatives were generally weak or even broken.

Up to the 1980s Gécamines employees could use these relations to obtain occasional assistance, or develop informal economic activities together. However, they turned out to be of limited use once all of them saw their means of existence decline and were left without resources. Later, after the VDP in 2003–2004, few Gécamines workers found new employment in the new companies that established in Katanga in the context of the mining boom. Unless the joint venture agreement stipulates that they must rehire the Gécamines employees working on the site, foreign investors prefer to recruit young graduates from technical colleges and universities. As a result, it is principally through these graduates' social networks that people get jobs in new mining companies. At most some ex-Gécamines employees in Likasi could get an unskilled and low paying job in small Asian companies thanks to the support of neighbours, former colleagues, or brothers in Christ.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that, although Bourdieu's theory of social space has limitations, it provides a fruitful starting point for studying the dynamics of inequality in the Congolese copperbelt over the postcolonial period. It needs to be adapted in order to take into consideration: (a) the macro processes shaping the local political economy; (b) how 'modernity' as a dominant culture form has been imposed, used and contested; and (c) the decisive role of social capital in individual strategies of mobility. Once the specific conditions that have presided over the formation of Katanga's social space have been established, Bourdieu's theoretical framework sheds new light on the trajectories of different social groups. It provides conceptual tools to understand how they faced the economic and political changes that have marked Katanga's postcolonial history, and came to (re-)position themselves in relation to each other as a result of these changes.

This is what the two case studies on white businessmen and Gécamines workers aimed to illustrate. At the eve of independence in 1960, both groups had in common the fact that they lived in relatively closed social worlds and participated in an economy of symbolic distinction principally founded on 'modern' culture. They have however responded to the turmoil of the postcolonial period in different ways. Gécamines workers were directly affected by the fall in copper prices and the plunder of the company by state authorities. To face this situation, they principally invested in informal economic activities and their children's school education. By contrast, the European businessmen I met in the early 2000s – that is, businessmen who had decided to stay in Congo after the Zairianization of foreign companies in 1973, and the looting of plants and shops by the army and the population in 1991 – managed to take advantage of their competitors' departure from the country, the decline of public companies, and the informal privatization of the state apparatus. To do so they built on their relationships with economic partners abroad. It is principally these relationships that allowed them to adapt to changes, and to provide jobs and contracts to the white minority as a whole.

Besides their respective economic capitals, the main difference between the trajectories of white entrepreneurs and Gécamines workers, I would argue, has depended on their social capital. Gécamines workers' social capital has remained very much confined to the Gécamines community, which has been collectively confronted with a dramatic decline of its living conditions. It has accordingly tended to limit their

investments' profitability in economic and/or cultural capital, unless they had the opportunity to send their children abroad. In contrast, white businessmen's transnational network gave them the opportunity to gain market shares in the most profitable sectors of the local economy, and in so doing, allowed the white community to reproduce itself as a profitable social capital for its members. The importance of this form of capital should not be a surprise to students of Africa. However, the challenge is to understand how it works for various social groups within the same social space, and what effects it tends to produce on the structure of social inequalities. These are issues that researchers have rarely addressed since the pioneering work of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute.

From a more general perspective, although the trajectories of white businessmen and Gécamines workers in the postcolonial period took different directions – upward for the former, downward for the latter – in both groups economic capital has tended to gain in symbolic significance while cultural capital was increasingly put into question. This tendency must be understood in the light of the profound changes that have affected the educational system, the job market and the economy in Congo since independence. Since a similar change may be observed in other places around the world (see Piketty 2013), however, it may be viewed as part of a more global transformation, to be associated with the rise of neoliberalism in a labour-surplus economy (Ferguson 2015).

How economic, cultural and social capital interrelate with other factors of inequality, and how processes of identity formation are influenced by the distribution of these different factors, deserves more research. On the basis of research in the Congolese copperbelt, this chapter has attempted to show that Bourdieu's theory of social space could nevertheless provide a relevant framework for studying the dynamics of inequality in Africa from a new vantage point: it offers a solution to the old problem of defining class boundaries; it invites us to understand class inequalities relationally, in their broader social context, beyond a narrow focus on individual life courses, or the formation of a single social class; and it provides tools for understanding the social conditions of people's subjective experience, and the larger power dynamics underlying it, without making of this experience the simple reflection of class position. This is an important challenge for anthropological research in Africa, where numerous studies in the last two decades have tended to give a phenomenological account of a (very) limited number of people's experience, to emphasize fragmentation and movement, and to gloss over everyday life in entire cities, regions or countries (Rubbers 2017). Partly developed on the basis of a critique of phenomenology, Bourdieu's theory of social space provides a good place from which to start paying more attention to

living conditions, differences in social trajectories, and broader dynamics of inequality again.

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Notes

1. According to Lamont (1992), however, the three 'theoretical' classes – dominant, middle and popular – distinguished by Bourdieu are based on an a priori definition, not on inductive analysis. In support of this critique, they are presented in numerous passages of his work as classes-in-themselves. So, even though the theoretical framework developed by Bourdieu in *Distinction* offers a way to overcome the classical problems of class analysis, these problems are not entirely resolved in his empirical study of France.
2. This analytical choice is justified by the concern to not take the primacy of cultural capital over economic and social capital for granted. The work of M. Lamont (1992, 2000) suggests that cultural capital in the United States is less important than in France, and takes a different form. As Coulangeon (2004: 78; 2011) points out, the weight that Bourdieu himself gives to cultural capital in French society is the product of a given context: the 'thirty glorious years' that followed World War II, during which France experienced a reduction in income inequalities. Since the 1980s, this trend has reversed, and economic capital has become an increasingly salient factor of social stratification again. In a sense, these studies invite us to come back to Bourdieu's theory of social space (the first step of his analytical methodology) so as to better take into consideration the relative weight of different forms of capital in the (re-)production of inequalities and the trajectories of socio-professional groups.
3. In 2015, Katanga was divided in four smaller provinces. For reasons of convenience, however, I will continue to refer to Katanga below.
4. This chapter expands some of the theoretical directions behind the WORKINMINING research project 'Reinventing Paternalism: The Micropolitics of Work in the Mining Companies of Central Africa' (www.workinmining.ulg.ac.be). Led by the author, this project received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement n° 646802). The ideas developed in this chapter reflect only the author's view. The ERC is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.
5. In a survey of 13,832 households in Lubumbashi in 2002, 42 per cent of respondents declared wage work as their main source of income (Nkuku Khonde and Remon 2006: 60). Today, this percentage is certainly much higher since the mining boom has caused a strong rise in employment and wages between 2004 and 2015.
6. To be more precise, Bourdieu (2000, 2003) proposes a culturalist theory of capitalism that associates it with a specific habitus founded on calculation. At no time does

he goes back on the historical conditions that would account for the emergence of the 'worldview' conveyed by this habitus; he assumes that in the economic field of 'advanced' societies, this habitus functions more or less in accordance with the logic of *homo economicus*. Hence his theory of capitalism supports the idea of a cultural divide between 'traditional' and 'modern' societies, and acknowledges the relevance of conventional economics for the latter. From an anthropological perspective, it is for that reason highly questionable.

7. As mentioned above, Bourdieu postulates a cultural divide between 'advanced' and 'traditional' societies. Perhaps he would have compared Katanga to colonial Algeria in the 1950s, and considered it as a society subjected to the devastating effects of colonialism? In his article 'La hantise du chômage chez l'ouvrier algérien' (1962), he stresses the role of personal contacts for Algerian urban workers in their search for employment. It is however impossible to draw from this a general argument about the relative weight of social capital in (post)colonial societies.
8. Since then, Katanga witnessed a mining boom, and the foreign population rose again. This recent development is not discussed here.
9. Interestingly, this social control is situational. When expatriates go back to Europe, it loses much of its significance. There, they have a much more relaxed lifestyle: they may walk, eat African food, and even mix with the Congolese.
10. This programme involved 10,000 employees out of a total of 24,000.
11. In 1965, the Union Minière employed 229 Congolese managers out of a total of 2,247 managers; in 1974, 1,135 out of 2,497; and in 1980, 2261 out of 3220 (Young and Turner 1985: 107). In 1990, there were only 247 expatriate managers remaining, mostly at retirement age.
12. 'Training school' is the translation of 'école préprofessionnelle', a school that provides basic technical training during three years after primary school.

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