

## MEMORY LIKENESS OF FULBERT YOULOU (1947-1963)

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### ABSTRACT

Under the colonial period, certain leaders of sub-Saharan Africa having received intellectual training gradually asserted themselves in the political arena. Among this elite, one of the emblematic figures is Abbé Fulbert Youlou, one of the fathers of the independence of the Congo between 1960 and 1963. He belongs to the Kongo ethnic group whose members were under French colonization, the head poster of the intellectual elite known as "the evolved" prepared to succeed the colonizer. This study displays the portrait of this character who marked the history of the young Republic of Congo. The duty of remembrance demands it from us especially on the eve of the celebrations linked to the 60 years of independence of the Congo.

### Keywords

*Africa; Colonization; Congo; Elite  
Leaders*

## INTRODUCTION

By reading the works of certain writers on the history of the Congo such as those of: Jean-Michel Wagret (Wagret, 1963b), Adolphe Tsiakaka (Tsiakaka, 2009), Joseph Yongolo-Nkoua (Yongolo-Nkeoua, 1993), Rudy Mbemba (Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009), Joachim Emmanuel Goma-Thethet (J. E. Goma-Thethet, 2016), etc. and by exploiting the very words of Father Fulbert Youlou recorded in the books, the latter is presented as an "evolved", an intellectual, and politician, a humanist attached to Kongo cultural values, intelligent, charismatic leader, apostle of the national unity, patriot, distinguished politician and ahead of his time, a man who had a vision for the Congo.

A man of the church and of exceptional stature, he was the first President of the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville from 1960 to 1963, after its accession to independence.

One question remains, however: what was his political career? Had he succeeded in raising the country to the level he claimed through his policy of social and economic development? Yet from his mid-term, the revolutionaries sang: "Youlou stole everything" as if to mark the collective conscience in his management.

The purpose of this study is to take a look at the man who was Father Fulbert Youlou, as well as at his actions, notably through the party he founded, the Democratic Union for the Defense of African Interests in 1956 (UDDIA).

We do not intend here to write the political history of the Congo through this emblematic character since the era of the formation of political parties after the Second World War, but rather to identify the great moments that have marked the life of this leader.

Admittedly, several studies have been carried out on the history of the Congo making mention of Fulbert Youlou, like the thesis of Désiré Niama which addresses an axis entitled: *The advent of Youlou and the acceleration of the political history of the Congo* (Niama, 2014). But the angle from which we treat it has never been the subject of in-depth reflection. The absence of several studies on this subject was the great difficulty we encountered in finalizing this article. However, those we were able to consult enabled us to build this corpus.

This study is therefore based on the information collected from these sources (written documents and oral surveys of resource persons). This work revolves around the following points: (1) birth and childhood of Fulbert Youlou, (2) Youlou's school career, (3) the entry of Fulbert Youlou into the political scene, (4) the political strategies of Father Fulbert Youlou, (5) the MSA Offensive, (6) the consolidation of national unity development policy, and (7) the failure and end of Youlou's political career.

## **METHODS**

This type of qualitative descriptive data analysis technique is a research method that utilizes qualitative data and is described descriptively (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This type of qualitative descriptive data analysis is often used to analyze events, phenomena, or situations socially. The methodology used is qualitatively using review literature on the Fulbert Youlou biography and life path.

## **RESULTS**

### **A. Birth and childhood of Fulbert Youlou**

The partial elements collected on Fulbert Youlou reveal that he was born on June 7, 1917 in Kimpouomo, a small village located near Mbanza-Tsamouna, an important town which developed a few kilometers from the village of Mfoa, and which would bear around the year 40 the name of Madibou. Madibou is now part of the city of Brazzaville, on the southern flank of the current arrondissement 2, Makélékélé, and now the eighth arrondissement of Brazzaville.

Son of peasants, his father Mbindi and his mother Bilombo, Fulbert Youlou was born when Europe was under the effect of bombs and the Congo was a French colonial empire in Equatorial Africa. Brazzaville is the federal capital. Barely, one can estimate at more than eight hundred inhabitants, the total population of the country. There are three main ethnic groups that occupy Brazzaville: the Teke (first occupants), the Kongo and the Mbozi. This ethnic configuration is very important to note, because between 1946 and 1960, the Congo had barely a handful of executives in the colonial administration and there were not many in political life.

### **B. Youlou's school career**

According to Rudy Mbemba, in the career of the young Fulbert Youlou, the year 1929 is capital since he will be led to integrate the minor seminary of Brazzaville. His interest in studies and culture in general makes him a brilliant student. André Grenard Matsoua, Simon Kimbangu are certainly elders of Young Fulbert Youlou, but still models to follow in the management of human problems. He will then be sent to Cameroon, more precisely to Akono, to complete his secondary studies. From Akono to Yaoundé, he joined the Grand Séminaire (Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009). According to Rudy Mbemba, wherever he studies, the Young Fulbert Youlou leaves his mark and it is for this reason that he is among the best students in philosophy at the Major Seminary of Yaoundé. It was during his training in Cameroon that the young Fulbert Youlou met one of his illustrious friends, in this case Boganda, one of the fathers of the independence of the Central African Republic (Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009).

From this interview with Boganda and some young people of his age considered as "men of light" for the development of the continent, Fulbert Youlou can therefore later play a role in the history of Africa and the Congo.

Upon his return to the country, he was assigned to the seminary of Mbamou as a teacher, and a few months after Libreville, to continue his training in theology. In this ascent to schooling, he was called to the priesthood on June 9, 1946, at the age of 29.

However, in 1946, Jean Félix Tchicaya, created the first Congolese political party, namely the Congolese Progressive Party (PPC). It should be noted that the young Fulbert Youlou was already experiencing his first pastoral care at the parish of Saint-François in Brazzaville and subsequently he was appointed chaplain of the hospital and the prison.

From that moment, because of his kindness, his simplicity, his intelligence, his intellectual insight and his sense of duty, he was considered a "high priest like no other". This creates some trouble for him within his church with his hierarchy and he is assigned to Mindouli for ecclesiastical reasons.

From there, he gradually began to take an interest in state affairs, in other words in political life, and he had a missionary godfather, Father Charles Lecomte.

### C. Fulbert Youlou's entry into the political scene

As a reminder, Fulbert Youlou was ordained a priest on June 9, 1946 in Brazzaville by Monsignor Paul Biéchy, including five young Congolese. They are therefore Fulbert Youlou, Théophile Mbemba and Louis Loubassou (Kongo ethnic group), Raphael Dangué and Benoît Gassongo (residents of Alima).

In any case, the political thought of this ecclesiastic takes on another value with his entry on the political scene. The man is friendly and welcoming. He is certainly small in stature, but this disability is compensated by a lively and relatively brilliant intelligence.

For example in the fusion of his functions, the religious activities he undertook, will open the way to him towards the political world. It is at the center of dynamism. By way of illustration: he manages various youth organizations, sports activities of the Catholic Church, chaplain of the general hospital and of the prison. He is in a way the focal point and the pole of attraction.

However, he is perceived by his adversaries as being a white man of the church since he is under the control of Father Charles Lecomte, his mentor. Confident of this dazzling rise, he is a candidate within the African college in the territorial elections of 1947 in the constituency of Pool, elections at the end of which he suffers a bitter failure, he is not officially sanctioned by his superiors ([Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009](#)).

According to Rudy Mbemba, Father Fulbert Youlou truly entered Congolese political life in 1956, the year in which he created his party: the Democratic Union for the Defense of African Interests (UDDIA). This party was born the day after the legislative elections of January 1956. Its charisma and its skill will indeed be the source of a great gathering of forces around its person and various personalities ([Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009](#)).

At the end of the elections of January 2, 1956 giving rise to the renewal of the National Assembly, which in reality are only the consequence of a dissolution of this assembly, Fulbert Youlou, remains until then unknown in the political arena.

Indeed, these elections gave success to Fulbert Youlou, a sacred destiny in Congolese political life. Its meteoric rise caused some concern from the colonial administration ([Kornégie, 2018](#)).

This can be justified by the fact that the party he founded was born following a rally around his person by certain personalities of national dimension. Several political actors of all categories see in him a promising future. As Joachim Emmanuel Goma-Thethet affirms ([J. Goma-Thethet, 2008](#)), "The political game presupposes actors and issues".

Precisely, about political actors in the Congo, Joachim Emmanuel Goma-Thethet made an interesting classification on this subject, showing the diversification and organization of these different categories by saying the following:

The actors are diverse and organized into categories, in a pyramidal form. At the top of the pyramid we class "political personnel". It is about all those who assume political responsibilities and whom sociologists call "the political class". Members of the political class have a profession, politics. They are ministers, parliamentarians, members of party apparatuses, parliamentary journalists, etc. ([Emmanuel, 2016](#)).

In the same perspective, Joachim Emmanuel Goma-Thethet brings together the Congolese political class, in terms of generations.

- 1) The first brings together the political actors of the period 1945-1963;
- 2) The second concerns those of the period 1964-1991 (one-party period);
- 3) The third brings together the political actors who emerged as a result of the national conference and the democratic processes of the 1990s.

By carefully observing this categorization of political actors, it is clear that Father Fulbert Youlou belongs to the first group. Let us point out here that Father Fulbert Youlou is above all a priest, his status as a priest does not give him access to the political world. Moreover, for example, for reasons of ecclesiastical discipline, in a bush mission in Mindouli, as soon as he presents his candidacy for the new

elections, his Bishop is opposed, and Fulbert Youlou, a defrocked priest in decline with his Bishop (Monsignor Michel Bernard and Brother de la Moureyre ) who thinks he is a priest, he must be one for life, Youlou exceeded this measure by saying: "I made myself a priest for my people and if my people asks for something else, I can only accept" (Tsiakaka, 2009).

In this regard, Rudy Mbemba writes the following : "On December 11, 1955, a letter from the Archbishop of Brazzaville was read from the pulpit, recalling that no priest is authorized to stand for the next elections" (Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009).

However, it is clear that for the band of Kongo nationals, Youlou must necessarily be their candidate to perpetuate the action of Matsoua, mythical character, an essential leader in the Kongo spirit, dead since 1942.

#### D. The political strategies of Father Fulbert Youlou

Until 1955, the Congo knew only two high-profile politicians. They are: Jean Félix Tchicaya and Jacques Opangault. The two Congolese political leaders emerge during the elections to the Constituent Assembly of November 18, 1945 (electoral college of non-citizens of the electoral district of Gabon-Moyen-Congo).

- 1) Jean Félix Tchicaya who created the Congolese Progressive Party (PPC) in 1946;
- 2) Jacques Opangault, the initiator of the creation of the Mouvement Socialiste Africain (MSA.) in 1957, which was initially the Société Française Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO).

At the turn of 1950, Fulbert Youlou fully committed himself to political life. When he makes this decision, a new transgression of the rules of the clergy which will earn him new, more severe sanctions this time, since he no longer has the right to wear a cassock or to celebrate worship. The Kongo or members of his ethnic group will then decide to provide him with a monthly allowance, a car and a driver to protect him from need. Now he can embark on the upcoming campaign, a campaign of rare physical and verbal violence.

In 1956, the UDDIA was created with the caiman as its emblem. By taking this animal as a symbol of his party, Fulbert Youlou was referring to the Kongo tradition, particularly with this proverb: "*Ngolo za ngandu ku m'tsila*", the literal translation gives the following: "the strength of the caiman lies in its tail ( *ngandu* means caiman). Note that the caiman is also both among the Kongo, the name of a clan, *ngandu*, and of its members, *bisi ngandu* . It is a totem animal. By this, he affirms that a leader is strong thanks to the support of his people.

However, on December 8, 1958, Fulbert Youlou was officially crowned Prime Minister. He poached two Deputies from the movement of Jacques Opangault who increased his majority from 23 to 25 seats. Opangault therefore counted henceforth on the next legislative elections scheduled in principle for March 1959 to regain the majority. For Jacques Opangault, it is a principle because these elections were decided by the agreements made in March 1958 with Fulbert Youlou. But the latter refuses to organize them. The amalgam is total between the two. On this subject , Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch think that :

The riots of February 1959, born of the conflict between Abbé Fulbert Youlou and Jacques Opangault, were hastily presented as a manifestation of tribalist exacerbation. She sees in it an essentially political manifestation, based on the conscious manifestation of cultural antagonisms for the conquest of state power.

About these days of rioting in Brazzaville, the precise analysis of the archives of the time, which Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch meticulously stripped, were less simple than it seems, and certainly more political than urban. It is not on the content of the text that the MSA had launched its campaign, but on a specific point: the setting of a date for the legislative elections when the party intended to regain the majority.

"On February 10, the MSA deputies tabled a motion before the Assembly: they would no longer take part in the work until the date of the elections was fixed. Many actions were launched: private meetings and even public conferences. The ardor of the militants there was, it is true, maintained by a "tribal

excitement which did not correspond! That too much, at the limits of the influence of political parties, depending on the personality of the leaders" (Tsiakaka, 2009).

At this stage, we therefore understand that the political issues between the two leaders are latent. But the pressure of the African actors on the independence which was not only the business of Fulbert Youlou rather than of all the African continent and the Congo was also another fight.

In 1958, General De Gaulle, campaigning for the referendum on the community, arrived in Brazzaville, the second stage of his African tour. He comes to convince the people of the AEF to vote yes to the new status he is offering them. A community that will allow each of these territories to exercise all the prerogatives of internal autonomy with the help of France.

Desiring to protect Fulbert Youlou, the French who were on Congolese soil proposed a compromise which would be content to decide on the principle of the renewal of the Chamber and completed the definitive organization of the structures of the State. These were all the more confused as power was shared between the two main cities: the ministerial offices had remained in Pointe-Noire, while the government and the deputies sat in Brazzaville.

### E. The MSA Offensive

Tension is rising within the MSA, observes Jean-Michel Wagret . Simon Pierre Kikhouna N' Got , in a public meeting held in Dolisie (department of Niari) in January 1959, invites the protagonists to unite. He declares:

I invite you to unite and, if necessary, to wage civil war to obtain the crushing of this government, which represents nothing and refuses new elections as previously agreed [...] The Niari people will not let it go, we are going to call new elections and, if necessary, we will impose them by force [...] It is not Youlou who is in charge. [...] I will go as far as civil war (Wagret, 1963a).

The Assembly interrupts its session for a fortnight. A few demonstrations took place. There is no question for us here of listing all the consequences linked to this political struggle. The damage caused by these demonstrations was enormous. What is obvious, there were several incidents in Poto-Poto, Bacongo and elsewhere. However, some tentative solutions were found to consolidate national unity.

### F. The consolidation of national unity

Father Fulbert Youlou launched an appeal on the antennas of Radio-Brazzaville, in these terms:

You must think that the world and Africa are currently staring at us and waiting for proof of our political maturity. This is why I therefore ask you all to forget your quarrels, to rise above tribal rivalries and to help me build our Congo with all of you, with respect for the human person, on democratic and in the French traditions in which we were brought up.

According to our informant, with this speech, Fulbert Youlou appears as the man of compromise, leading to the union of all the living forces, a true founding father of the Republic.

Having become President of the Republic, his battlefield is to want to fully root in Congolese habits and customs, the fundamental principle of national unity which he has already classified as soon as he entered political life as the "rule of 'gold' by the many journeys he makes throughout the country. It supports this national unity in development policy.

### G. Development policy

Father Fulbert Youlou 's vision is probably pan- Congolese and pan-African. He engages in a pragmatic economic policy considering the mentality of the population. He refuses socialist theories, precisely that of China (*I accuse China: 1966*). He is politically liberal. For Fulbert Youlou, communist doctrine is destructive and bloody, above all racist and anti-religious. She brings nothing (Fulbert, 1966). It cruelly attacks the Marxist vision of the management of development problems in Africa and puts agriculture at the top. He says in these terms: "Agriculture is the only problem of the young States. Because, it conditions the food supply and the improvement of the standard of living" (Fulbert, 1966).

As a result, the law of January 15, 1961 put in place a "three-year development program thus covering the years 1961, 1962 and 1963 (Mbemba Dya Bô Benazo-Mbanzulu, 2009).

However, as soon as he came to power a year later, notes this informant, private investments amounted to nearly 13.4 billion francs in the agricultural, forestry, industrial and tertiary sectors.

One of these flagship projects that fueled his ambitions was that of the construction of the Kouilou dam by the National Office du Kouilou (ONAKO) at the Sounda gorges. For him, this barrage would offer a triple advantage. First the installation of giant industries, then the power consumption, and finally the use of aluminum. Thus, the Congolese economy would result in:

- 1) The creation of a large number of new jobs;
- 2) The increase in public revenue, resulting from industrial activity and commercial activities;
- 3) The establishment of an industrial core which would facilitate the installation of a whole range of small ancillary industries (maintenance, repairs, provision of services, etc.) (Tsiakaka, 2009).

Thus, having recovered the Kouilou project from France, Fulbert Youlou made it a Congolese concern. By a law of December 2, 1960, "the National Assembly launched the hydroelectric development work of the Kouilou in the public interest". In his speech at the ceremony of the launching of works in 1961, writes Joseph Gamandzori affirms: President Youlou sets out his objectives in these terms:

The dam, whose foundations are naturally traced, offers exceptional facilities. It will give birth to a lake, three and a half times the size of Lake Geneva and which will go as far as Loudima, 230 km from here.

The volume of concrete required is the same as at Bort, ie 450,000 m<sup>3</sup>. But in Bort, the volume of water retention is 300 million m<sup>3</sup>, while in Kouilou, it will be 60 billion, half of which is usable, which gives a ratio of one percent (Gamandzori, 2009).

Fulbert Youlou was also inspired by the program of Félix Eboué presented on October 31, 1936 in Guadeloupe at the opening of the 2nd ordinary session of the General Council. Program focused on agricultural, health, major works, school, sports and tourism policy. To achieve this, he wants to go through the reorganization of all political parties into one, ie to have a single party. The political and union leaders, hostile to this project, raised a great collective movement of indignation which led it to failure.

## **H. The failure and end of Youlou's political career**

The precursor events to the fall of Fulbert Youlou were, according to some analysts, the creation of the Single Party in the image of Sékou Touré, and the reaction of the trade union movements (Congolese Revolution), linked to the situation of the three forces: politics, union and army.

The general malaise that marked the end of President Fulbert Youlou's term of office was complicated by popular anger aroused by the weakness he had for the group to which he belonged. The representatives of this one seems to have dictated to him a certain number of unfortunate decisions which were going to lead him to his downfall. In fact, this weakness for his home group seemed to be shared by all politicians. Clearly assertive in this one, diffuse in that one, but the result was the same. It became intolerable when it was embodied by a President of the Republic. The difficulty of finding a way to regulate ethno-regional particularisms which expressed themselves more or less at the individual or collective level was the main obstacle to sound management of the State. We can never say enough about the harm done to the Congo by the narrow relationship to the ethnic group of belonging. It appeared to the observer that there were ethnic groups that claimed to be superior to others.

But deep down, Fulbert Youlou, we liked him. In all sincerity, the President had remained a priest at heart. It is not excessive to think that he was pursued by remorse for having defrocked himself, while loving life and pleasures. And that he did not want to leave the cassock is a piece of evidence to advance in this assertion.

Gossip swirled about him. He would be a head of state totally devoid of any sense of responsibility in the exercise of his office. But gossip is still gossip.

We must recognize that he was a just and good man. Just, when the life of the Republic depended on it, he did not hesitate to throw in prison the politico-administrative authorities guilty of embezzlement and extortion of public funds.

We had never heard that he remained deaf to those who asked and implored. And his priestly language never incited ethnic violence and separation. And when he was removed from office, we never heard that he stirred up his people to cling to power.

However, to put himself above the fray and be the impartial arbiter and the good father who does not show respect of anyone, it would have been necessary for Father President to avoid surrounding himself with relatives chosen from his ethnic group. and singularly influential and tribalist.

For Emile Biayenda , the choice of Fulbert Youlou is made on a member of the clan who has the skills and the grip of a future leader, full of fairness, impartial, having a sense of justice, firm in his decisions, appreciated and judged as such by the clan, the allies and all the neighbors (Biayenda, 1968).

So that, when he was overthrown, many thought that it was the fault of Dominique Nzalakanda who dictated everything to him. And that it was the refusal to separate from this man that had led to his downfall and not so much the chaotic management of his power, because deep down, we liked him, it is important to repeat.

## CONCLUSION

At the end of this article on the historical portrait of Father Fulbert Youlou, we unfolded the following bridges: Youlou's school career, Fulbert Youlou's entry into the political scene, the political strategies of Father Fulbert Youlou, the MSA offensive, the consolidation of national unity, development policy, the failure and the end of Youlou's political career. The aim here is not to write the general history of the Congo through this character, but to show the role he played in the course of events which marked the political life of the Congo from 1947 to 1963. As soon as he entered politics, Father Fulbert Youlou knew how to impose himself very quickly by gathering around him a large number of political leaders from several regions. This allowed him to acquire a wider audience. Its political program is identified by a fierce anti-communism and a radical economic liberalism. Very early on, he knew how to put the Congo on the road to sovereignty. Which brings him to the rank of the fathers of independence. But very quickly too, President Youlou's policy worried the conjecture of the three forces: the members of the government (the politicians), the trade union leaders (the trade unionists), the military leaders (the Army) who denounced "the notorious unconsciousness of the party in power" and "in the face of the failure of the regime, decide to wage a merciless struggle for the immediate transformation of its social policy, by satisfying the legitimate aspirations of the Congolese people".

The grievances against him can be summed up in these terms: for the revolutionaries, Fulbert Youlou did not materialize his ambitions, to make Congo-Brazzaville an economic power. Negotiations with Germany and France to obtain funding which should enable the construction of the Kouilou dam have not been fruitful and convincing. This dam was, for Father Fulbert Youlou, the basis of the structuring of the economic fabric and the engine of the development of Congo. However, the economic difficulties of the country gradually weakened the political life of Father Fulbert Youlou and led to an attack by union leaders. Hence the revolution of August 13, 14, and 15, 1963.

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