

# 'Children of violence'

## Interview with Juliana Lumumba

Patrice Lumumba still rings out as an icon of resistance to the terror of colonialism in Africa. **Leo Zeilig** interviewed his daughter, Juliana, 41 years after imperialist forces murdered him.



Juliana Lumumba

Patrice Emery Lumumba is perhaps the most famous leader of African independence. After his murder in 1961 he became an icon of anti-imperialist struggle. His picture was brandished on demonstrations across the world in the 1960s.

Lumumba's life marked some of the key fault lines in the second half of the 20th century; how the cold war would be fought in Africa and the nature of independence granted to swaths of the globe after 1945. For those fighting liberation struggles, Lumumba became a figure of resistance to the imperial division of the world. His refusal to compromise with imperialism means he is still an important figure.

Despite his political career he

was devoted to his family. Lumumba had five children, and wished he had time for more. The lives of his children were thrown into turmoil by their father's extraordinary life.

In October 1960 Juliana, Francois and Patrice were sent to Egypt. The next year they were joined by their mother Pauline and their youngest brother Roland. This was a step Lumumba took to protect his children and he thought it would be for a short period. But the children ended up completing their schooling in Egypt. They were the guests of President Gamal Abd-al-Nasser. It was an intensely political environment. Their household received visitors from movements still fighting for independence.

His daughter Juliana Lumumba,

though only six when her father was killed, remembers a man who wanted to bring up his children and was involved in their lives. This interview was conducted in Kinshasa in November 2006, days after the first elections in the Congo since her father was elected 46 years before.

*Can you tell me about yourself?*

I was born in Stanleyville in 1955. We left the city in October 1960 and completed our schooling in Egypt. President Nasser's family became our friends. We were considered guests of the president of the republic, and we never had the status of refugees. I was in a French boarding school, until the end of my secondary studies. I

received my baccalaureate in Cairo. I then spent one year in Belgium, and afterwards completed my university studies in France. I was a minister for five years under Kabila I [Laurent Kabila who came to power in 1997, he was a longstanding Lumumbist] and now I have a communication company.

*What are memories do you have of your father?*

I have lots of memories of my father, because when I was small I was very close to him... I was often in his office. My father was someone very affectionate, when he was with us he chatted, played.

He worked enormously hard. When I was in his office I would watch him work, rewriting a speech or practising one of them. Of course he was busy and he was often absent, but when he was there, he was really present. I remember when he came back late, he would come and see me. My mother didn't want us to call him 'Patrice', so he was always 'Papa'.

*Apparently your parents had a difficult relationship?*

My parents were very young. When my father died he was 36 years old. My mother was a widow at 28. It was a marriage that had all the problems of marrying at such a young age, and with a couple who often didn't see each other. She knew that he was totally preoccupied by politics and that our house was open to everyone. I don't think they had any more problems than this... my mother has never remarried, she never wanted to. She had an enormous amount of love for her husband.

*You had an extraordinary childhood. Can you describe it to me?*

I never had the life of a young Congolese girl brought up in her country. I often say that we were the children of violence, in that we left the country in such painful and difficult conditions, hidden in a military jeep and then flown secretly to a foreign country where we couldn't speak a word. Then living with people that we didn't know.

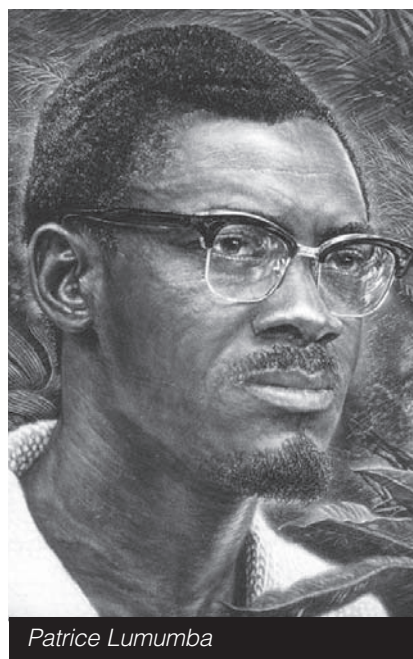
But we were very fortunate. We lived with an Egyptian family. The father who had brought us over from the Congo had worked in the Egyptian embassy in Leopoldville. We were brought up like his children, calling them mother and father. He was a man of great love and tolerance.

He had created the African Association in 1947, so our house received all those fighting for independence...

His children were Muslim, we were Christian. On Sunday we got up for church and would wake the family, so it was decided that we all had to leave the house together, so there would be no protesting. The last thing that my father said to Francois [Lumumba's eldest son] as we were leaving for Cairo was that we must finish our schooling and then return home. Our Egyptian father knew this well, and although we were in an English speaking country we went to a French school, because we were aware of the need to return afterwards. We also spoke French in the house as my father had instructed Francois before we left. We knew that the Congo was our country.

We lived in a nationalist and revolutionary family. During the

1960s the Congo had been internationalised and in Egypt we grew up in an environment where we were reminded constantly that we were the children of the nationalist hero Lumumba. And we



Patrice Lumumba

always knew that behind the murder were international forces, imperialist ones. But we benefited from a certain distance, far from the Congo and Belgium, we did not grow up with hate. We knew that Belgium was involved in the assassination of our father but it was the Belgian state and not the Belgian people.

We were not brought up in hate, hate only begets hate. We were brought up with the attitude that to be worthy of the name Lumumba, we had to deserve it.

We only saw Nkrumah once, but we were great friends with his family. His wife Fatima Nkrumah was Egyptian and his children played with us.

*You were very young when the crisis was played out in the Congo, but do you retain any memories of that dreadful year 1960?*

It is hard to make the distinction between my memories and the collective memories of the period. Because my father is so well known, we have seen many documentaries and films. I remember our house

was surrounded by soldiers from the UN and the soldiers of Mobutu. Every morning my brothers had to go to school, and although I wasn't at school I took the car with my brother. One day the driver

returned without Patrice and Francois, they had a problem with the soldiers. I remember another incident. It was Roland, who was a baby, very small but chatty. He received a rifle blow from a soldier who insulted him. He still carries the scar.

*What were you doing when you learnt of your father's murder?*

We were already in Cairo and it was one month afterwards. Our Egyptian father brought us together to tell us that our father was dead. It was curious because we heard people in the street demonstrating, everyone crying our name... we could hear "Lumumba, Lumumba". I was very sickly as a young child, but a car was sent for Patrice and Francois so they could be shown to the demonstrators, protected by soldiers who always guarded us. They moved around the city. I remember how strange it was to hear our name chanted by the crowd.

*Your father's political development was rapid. He advocated a Belgium-Congolese community in the mid-1950s, but by the end of the decade he was a fervent nationalist.*

Our father was a self-educated man, but to live in the Congo in the 1950s was a deeply humiliating process. If you were 'educated' you would be given a test. Someone would come to the house and see if you had an inside toilet, if your children wore pyjamas, if you ate with a knife and fork - only then would you be given the accreditation "évolué" ["evolved" or civilised]. You were then given permission to enter certain whites-only shops which were normally barred for Africans.

My father's political life lasted just three years, he developed with incredible speed. Everything that he demanded, "immediate independence" he was not the first but he became the incarnation of independence; he became the representative and symbol...

*In 2000 the Belgium government established the Lumumba Commission to uncover the role of the Belgian government in his murder. Were you satisfied with the conclusions?*

We were happy with the Lumumba Commission, it was a courageous step. There are many countries that have not done the same thing. This was an event still so alive and controversial for the country. I cannot say that we were satisfied by the conclusions, but it was an important stage. But we must not forget also the role of the Congolese, and no such commission has been held in our own country.

*What is your father's principle legacy?*

He fought all the way for convictions, he never retreated. It is this that people recognise today. In the Congo it is Lumumba who is

remembered and celebrated, not Mobutu who was in power for 32 years. The reference point for the Congolese remains Lumumba. There were others but they did not carry the hope of the Congolese.

*It is strange to see the UN again on the streets of the Congolese capital, does it anger you? (The UN placed Lumumba under house arrest and assisted in his removal).*

After ten years of war we would not have the elections if it was not for the foreign intervention. Even if I do not like that we are more or less living in a UN protectorate it was the only way we could hold the elections. I voted in the Congo for the first time in the referendum at the age of 50.

I left to vote very early with my mother at about 6 o'clock, a little time afterwards I said to myself "Papa I have voted!" It was the first time that we had become citizens since the government of Lumumba.

*What happened to your brothers?*

Francois is involved politically and has his own political party the MNC-L. Married, with no children. Patrice has his own business. Roland is an architect. They all live in the Congo. My mother lives in Kinshasa, in the house that Lumumba bought.

Lumumba left his children, and the Congolese, the duty to reconstruct the Congo. Those were the words that he addressed to us in the final letter: to work with all the Congolese for the future of the country. It was this duty that he asked of us.

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