

***Théâtres and mikilistes: Congolese films and Congolese diasporic identity in the Post-Mobutu period (1998-2011)***

**Rosette Sifa Vuninga**

**History Department**

**Faculty of Art**

**University of the Western Cape**

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***Supervisor: Doctor Paolo Israel***

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## ***To Josée Ntagozera,***

For both my parents, you were a sister from “another” father, mother, and country, as we called it. For us the children, you were an aunty and a friend. And although you did not have children of your own, you loved and gave many of us the biggest motherly love. I was your “little Princess” every time I visited you in your Shagasha home. For me, you were all in one and the greatest woman who inspired me the most!

***May your soul rest in peace!***



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## Introduction

In 2010 Bony Beya<sup>1</sup> directed and produced *Mzansi Fo Sho*, his first successful Congolese *théâtre* made in Cape Town. For this production, actors were recruited randomly among Congolese living around the City Bowl District of Cape Town. In fact, Beya took just about any Congolese who was willing to volunteer to act in his *théâtre* as he had almost no budget. He organised rehearsals during which he had to train most of his actors, the majority of whom had never interacted with the camera before. There was no fixed script; rather, everyone was briefed on the story and their role. The *théâtre* was shot in actors' apartments and Cape Town public gardens/parks; was played in Lingala, the language of *théâtres* produced in Kinshasa; and it was filmed with an amateur camera. *Mzansi Fo Sho* is based on the lives of Congolese in Cape Town and what they endure in their everyday lives. The *théâtre* has multiple plotlines. One of the threads of this *théâtre* focuses on a young man who calls his relatives in Europe to ask for money to help him survive in Cape Town. When he gets the money, however, he uses it to party, buy alcohol and expensive clothes to give him the look of a *mikiliste* — someone who lives (or who has been) in a relatively developed country and who sees himself as different from others (non *mikilistes*).<sup>2</sup> Another story shows a young man who works as a security guard without legal identity documents in South Africa. He thought of solving his paper problem and of bettering his financial position by marrying a relatively older rich woman. However, the main story in *Mzansi Fo Sho* is about a young woman who came to Cape Town to stay with her relatives with whom she was in contact for years and who encouraged her to come to Cape Town. When she reached Cape Town, she phoned them to say she had arrived. Her relatives ensured her that they were going to pick her up in less than thirty minutes. After hours, she tried to phone them again but

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<sup>1</sup> Bony Beya is a professional photographer and the director and producer of *Mzansi fo Sho* (2010). He was a journalist in Kinshasa and here in South Africa, he works as freelancer photographer for Moonlight Production, one of the biggest film productions in Cape Town. His contribution to this thesis has been very important.

<sup>2</sup> A look of someone who lives in a relatively developed country and who sees himself as different from locals. *Mikilisme* is seen through the way someone dresses, speaks, walks, or thinks, and it is often associated with a white man's ways of life that one learn from living in a relatively developed country such as European and American countries and South Africa, just to name a few.

they were unreachable. She knew no one else to contact in Cape Town, she had to sleep at the bus station for few days until one day other Congolese found her and promised to take her to someone who could help with a place to stay and food. She was taken to a house of one Congolese woman but the free shelter she was promised came with a price: she was forced into prostitution like other young women in the house and to report to the madam of the house by giving her all the money she was making as part of her contribution for staying in that house.

Bony Beya explained that *Mzansi Fo Sho* was made to show those in the DRC and other places in the Congolese diaspora several things: 1. That there are *théâtres* also produced in Cape Town; 2. What some Congolese do in Cape Town; 3. What it means to be a Congolese in Cape Town, 4. The hardships of life in Cape Town as *mikili*; 5. What some people have to engage in to survive these hardships; and 6. Life in South Africa is not the paradise that people in the DRC imagine.<sup>3</sup>

This thesis focuses on *théâtres* as a unique genre in Congolese cinema. I start with an overview of Congolese *théâtres* produced in the DRC from colonial to post Mobutu eras by looking at their major themes and their means of production. However, the main focus is on *théâtres* produced by Congolese in the DRC and abroad in the post Mobutu period from 1998 to 2011. I chose to begin with 1998 as it marks the beginning of the wars in the east, which led to a number of crises in the entire country including an increase in Congolese migration. I end with 2011 because it is the year of the last elections in the DRC, to which the Congolese diaspora reacted remarkably and made international headlines with angry protests and speaking loudly against what they believed was a global plot against democratic elections in their country. Congolese, especially those of the diaspora condemned the interference of world superpower nations in their internal politics.<sup>4</sup> The period covered in this research also marks the booming of Congolese *théâtre* productions locally and in the diaspora (*mikili*). Hence I look at the characteristics of these diasporic productions and the role they play in understanding Congolese diasporic identity in the post-Mobutu era. I look at the dialogues that *théâtres* create between locals (those in the DRC) and the diaspora, regarding the lives of Congolese; as well as the various concealed and encoded messages that *théâtres* convey, especially with regard to the

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2 February 2013.

<sup>4</sup> “Sapa- AFP, DRC election result announcement postponed, diaspora violence flares,” *Sunday Times*, 07 December, 2011.

question of Congolese identity and also the politics of the country. My main endeavour is to demonstrate that through *théâtres* they produce in the DRC and in the diaspora, Congolese show “who they are, what sort of people they are and how they relate to others”;<sup>5</sup> in other words, I use *théâtres* to identify some of the complexities associated with Congolese-ness focusing on the diaspora.

The relationship between charismatic churches and TV serials in the DRC, both booming in the post Mobutu era, have been key issues in Katrien Pype’s impressive research on Congolese *théâtres* and their Pentecostal interpretation of life.<sup>6</sup> One of her many interesting arguments is that religious themes in Congolese TV fictions increased in the post-Mobutu era and that Charismatic churches came to understand the influence of television celebrities on Congolese societies. Hence, charismatic churches thought of producing TV serials with celebrities people could look up to for their morality and Christianity.<sup>7</sup> But although religion is present (or rather mentioned) in most Congolese *théâtres*, this does not mean that they are all religious, because not all *théâtre* productions are affiliated with charismatic churches. To be more specific, despite the presence of religious discourse in almost all *théâtres*, the stories in the *théâtre* do not always end in confession and/or conversion, which is typical of religious dramas. Indeed, charismatic churches become influential in Congolese *théâtres* after the fall of Mobutu and his politics of nationalism.<sup>8</sup> However, although forms of Congolese popular culture, including *théâtres*, have largely freed themselves from serving the state, they do not all conform to charismatic churches’ interpretation of their lives, including illness, economic struggles, political instabilities, etc.<sup>9</sup> In fact, recent *théâtres*, especially those produced after year 2000, have revolted against the charismatic churches by exposing their ruse of exploiting people and the way they are used as a means of generating income by their leaders. False prophets and misleading naïve Christians

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<sup>5</sup> M. Hogg and D. Abrams. ‘Social Identifications’, *A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

<sup>6</sup> See amongst others, K. Pype. ‘Audience Participation and Performance in the Production of Kinshasa’s Television Serials: Explorations into the Dynamics of the Cultural Public Sphere in a Central-African Megapolis’, *Recherches en communication*, 28 (2007); K. Pype, ‘Scripting Kinshasa’s Teleserials: Reflections on Authorship, Creativity, and Ownership’, in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, Ed. J. Gray and D. Johnson, John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (2013); K. Pype, ‘Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 3 (Sept.2009); K. Pype, ‘Historical Routes: Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa’, *Studies in World Christianity*, 15, (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Pype, ‘Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa’, 542.

<sup>8</sup> Pype, ‘Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa’, 543.

<sup>9</sup> Pype, ‘Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa’, 543.

have also been exposed by non-religious *théâtre* groups. *Théâtres* produced in the DRC and in the diaspora have all been about what a life of ordinary Congolese entails wherever they find themselves, and religion comes in along with other aspects of the everyday, but it is not always located at the centre of the story. I therefore argue that research on nonreligious *théâtres* in DRC and in *mikili* is needed to add to the complexity of Congolese cinema and how they express Congolese culture.

Scholars have demonstrated the role of cinema in shaping peoples' identity in the diaspora. Research conducted on Indian diaspora and their films has shown that "Hindi Indians, wherever they happen to be worldwide film narratives, viewing practices, and patterns of socialization in the Indian American diaspora intersect to create a discursive realm of consensus regarding notions of 'Indianness'".<sup>10</sup> L. N. Tirumala wrote that research on the Indian diaspora has proved that Indians maintain their culture by using "media products".<sup>11</sup> Another view holds that immigrants are connected to their "home" popular culture. This is seen through the popularity of Hindu dance classes amongst Indian immigrants in England; most Indians in the diaspora who want to learn Hindu dance as a way of connecting to their culture are from the second and the third generations.<sup>12</sup> The idea of learning Hindu dance is inspired by Bollywood cinema. This idea takes us to what is termed as "diasporic awareness" and which is explained as a "need to refresh and recast a sense of Indian identity through cultural (re)production".<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, it has been proven that Nollywood films made by Nigerian diaspora in Europe tend to stick to the model of "home" films but the stories are inspired by what they experience in their host communities.<sup>14</sup> It is in this context that I develop my own view on Congolese diaspora and the *théâtres* they produce. I see their productions as inspired by *théâtres* from "home" they visualise and their effort in maintaining both Congolese and *mikiliste* identities. They show what

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<sup>10</sup> A. Punathambekar, 'Bollywood in the Indian-American Diaspora: Mediating a transitive logic of cultural citizenship', *International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2005), 152.

<sup>11</sup> L. N. Tirumala, 'Bollywood Movies and Identity Construction Amongst Second Generation Indian Americans'. Masters Thesis, Texas Tech University, (Aug. 2009), 2.

<sup>12</sup> A. H. David, 'Dancing the Diasporic Dream? Embodied Desires and the Changing Audiences for Bollywood Film Dance,' *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies Participation*. 7, 2 (Nov. 2010), 3.

<sup>13</sup> David, 'Dancing the Diasporic Dream? Embodied Desires and the Changing Audiences for Bollywood Film Dance,' 3.

<sup>14</sup> S. Samyn, "Nollywood in Europe," in M. Krings and O. Okome (eds) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013).



they have in common (their hardship) with those in the DRC, while at the same time bragging about their *mikiliste* status.

Cham wrote that African films can be understood as a “creative expression”. To that he added that African films can be considered as a “discourse” which is cultural, artistic, intellectual and political.<sup>15</sup> Wa Thiong’o has also argued that “community learned and passed its moral codes and aesthetic judgment through narratives, dances, *théâtres*, rituals, music, games and sports”.<sup>16</sup> During Mobutu’s period not only his political rivals were to be watched closely but also musicians, journalists, actors, etc. were under his scrutiny. Many Congolese including musicians, writers and political activists feared for their lives and saw themselves spending years in exile. Lwambo Makiadi is one of the well-known Congolese musicians who more than once had to fly out of the country because it was not all the time that Mobutu was pleased with his singing.<sup>17</sup> In post-Mobutu era, the situation has not improved much with regard to media and how it is controlled and manipulated by his successors. The only difference is that in post-Mobutu era, Congolese popular culture has developed the ruse of hiding behind the “social” and “cultural”, in other words, they do their best to stay away from the “politics” even though the last is what causes all the malfunctions at cultural, social and even economical levels. It is also obvious that the Congolese authorities are well aware of the shifts in performance as being only about the social and cultural of the everyday. But when we think of performance as “the representation of being,”<sup>18</sup> we realize that Congolese have totally used their acting talents to express themselves about what they endure in their everyday; and even though they do their best to keep the politics of the country out of the themes of performance, the message is loud and clear that what damages the so called social and cultural of their lives is rooted in the way the country is run. My argument therefore is that *théâtres* are a comedy of the everyday with a hidden political message.

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<sup>15</sup> M. Cham, Film and History in Africa: a critical survey of current trends and tendencies. Paper presented at International Conference at University of Cape Town, South Africa, July 6-8, 2002, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Wa Thiong’o, “The Politics of Performance Space,” *TDR*, vol. 41, no.3 (The MIT Press, 1988), 11.

<sup>17</sup> G. Stewart, “Prologue” in *Rumba on the river: A history of the popular music of the two Congos* (London & New York, 2000), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Wa Thiong’o, “The Politics of Performance Space,” 11.



## ***Théâtres* as a genre**

Congolese *théâtres* are known as *maboke*, *théâtres populaires* or *télédramatiques*.<sup>19</sup> They are also called “*théâtres de chez nous*”. They are rarely called “films” by Congolese, they are more often called just “*théâtres*” because of the first performance that were done on stage, in front of a specific audience. In fact, the concept of “Congolese film” is mainly used by non-Congolese to mean any form of popular films by Congolese. I consider *théâtres* as a sub-genre in Congolese cinema. I refer to the definition of genre by Fabian in his study of paintings in Shaba in the 1970s, where he stresses that a genre should be understood as a “complex of form, content, and presentation” which can help recognising an art as a “kind” and which can systematically be distinguished from “another kind”.<sup>20</sup> *Théâtres* as genre in Congolese cinema meet the requirement of the above mentioned definition as both the consumers and producers have the same ideas regarding what their products should look like and their characteristics.<sup>21</sup> Bony Beya explains: “if someone tells you ‘I have something to watch from Congo’, the reaction is always ‘is it a *théâtre*, a film or a documentary?’”<sup>22</sup> Many Congolese hold the view that so far two successful films have been produced in the DRC: *La Vie Est Belle* (1987) and *Viva Riva* (2010). Those are the best known films, although recently there have been films produced by people who are part of the Congolese Swahili diaspora in Scandinavia, known as “Scandiwood”; however, these films remain unknown by most of *théâtre* viewers. These Scandiwood films in Swahili (some with English subtitles) are discussed in more detail in the second chapter.

The concept of *théâtre* is a problematic one as its meaning is debated between its viewers and its producers. From interviewing producers and viewers, I discovered that some producers call their productions “films” but those who watch them would classify them as “*théâtres*”. Reasons for this subdivision by viewers in film vs. *théâtre* include the language used (which for *théâtres* is often Lingala); the actors (if they are known for acting in *théâtres* before; the duration

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<sup>19</sup> Pype, “Audience Participation and Performance in the Production of Kinshasa’s Television Serials. Explorations into the Dynamics of the Cultural Public Sphere in a Central-African Megapolis,” *Recherches en communication*, n° 28 (2007).

<sup>20</sup> J. Fabian and I. Fabian, “Art, History, and Society: Popular Painting in Shaba, Zaire,” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communications*, Vol. 3, No 1 (1976), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Fabian and Fabian, “Art, History, and Society: Popular Painting in Shaba, Zaire,” 1

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

(if it has more than two parts running for over 40 minutes); the amount of comedy (if it is judged too funny it cannot be a film); the locations of shooting (*théâtres* are often shot in small location, a relatively limited space, in houses or verandas, or local bars, while films can be shot in the street, in cars, in ships, etc.); and the quality of sound and image (good for films, bad for *théâtres*).<sup>23</sup> Most of these criteria are based on comparing Congolese cinema to Hollywood, Nollywood, Bollywood and Swahiliwood films. Unfortunately relying on these film industries to decide what is a “film” and what is “less film” (as *théâtres* are often judged) has been considered by some scholars to be a form of “cultural enslavement”.<sup>24</sup> All of the producers I interviewed describe *théâtres* as an “original Congolese cinema”, an idea that matches Ekwazi’s argument which emphasises the importance of “originality” in Third World cinema. Ekwazi believes that Third World cinema has to stick to the “circumstances” of their creation.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the stories, quality and quantity of the films have to reflect the condition of lives of Congolese while also expressing their own visions of what they think of as an ideal life.

In *Modernity and African Cinema*, Shaka discusses issues surrounding African cinema. He argues for a proper definition of African film. He suggests that African cinema should be defined according to notions of “Africaness”, “modernity” and “subjectivity” (identity). He feels that “the lack of detailed study of cinematic practices of colonial Africa has resulted in generalizing arguments that lump uncritically together the two divergent cinematic practices that emerged in Africa during this period, i.e, colonial African instructional cinema and colonialist African cinema”.<sup>26</sup> *Théâtres* conform to the notion of “Africaness” and that of Congolese in particular because of their focus on Congolese culture through the language they use, their stories, the music, dance fashion and other Congolese cultural particularities we see in them and which distinguish them from other Africans. “Subjectivity” is used by Congolese in the making and remaking of their local and diasporic identity. This can be well seen through the ways *mikilistes*, for example, define themselves in relation to “others” (Congolese in the DRC and other immigrants). Subjectivity is important in inventing Congolese since what it means to

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Bony Beya (Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013) and Bakari Matondo (Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013), a *théâtre* actor of Diaspora de Jobourg and son of the late *théâtre* legend Mathieu Matondo (Sans Soucis).

<sup>24</sup> H. Ekuazi, “Towards the Decolonization of the African Film,” *Africa Media Review* Vol. 5 No. 2 (1991), 99.

<sup>25</sup> Ekuazi, “Towards the Decolonization of the African Film,” 103.

<sup>26</sup> F.O. Shaka, *Modernity and the African Cinema: A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcolonialist and Modern African Identities*. (Trenton and Asmara, African World Press, Inc. 2004). 21-22.

be a Congolese differs from one Congolese to another especially given the simple fact that most Congolese have interacted with other cultures. This is seen through the way in which diasporic Congolese identity differs from local identity. There is a way locals define *mikilistes* and there is a way the latter define themselves by emphasizing the facts associated with *mikilism*. Local *théâtres* on *mikilistes* contribute to understanding how locals make it clear that *mikilistes* are not like them. In *théâtres* produced abroad, *mikilistes* also show their own identity as differing from the locals. Congolese-ness, however, is claimed by both locals and diaspora and subjectivity is used by both parts to emphasise some particular differences.

## **Research scope and methodology**

My research is based on three kinds of primary sources: *Théâtres* (as well as some films), interviews and newspapers. This research also borrows some methodological strategies from the works of Katrien Pype who focuses on Congolese religious dramas/*théâtres*. I have spent some time with Bony Beya conversing with him about *théâtres* and how they are made and the message they transmit to their viewers in *mikilili* and Cape Town in particular. I have also organised some meetings with Congolese where we have to watch *théâtres* together and make comments on their stories, themes, actors, quality and the extent to which they speak to Congolese-ness in a way they could relate to. I also draw on secondary material on African films, diasporic identity and scholarship especially on Bollywood, Nollywood, Swahiliwood, and Scandiwood as well as on diasporic identity.

1. I have established a large archive of Congolese *théâtres* that are sold by *agences* and other, Congolese stores, *théâtres* actors and producers, and Congolese informal DVD vendors in Cape Town. I have watched and analysed about fifty *théâtres* and films, most of which were produced between 1998 and 2011 in the DRC and in *mikili* by Congolese, noting the plots, characters, and the language (especially when discussing the exclusion associated with Lingala as the language of “real Congolese”). This constitutes a solid basis to discuss *théâtre* as a genre in the period under consideration. Attention was also paid to internet sources and news and parent forms of Congolese popular culture.

2. I have spoken to many Congolese and non-Congolese on *théâtres*. However, my work is generally based on the views of thirty interviewees –seven Congolese *théâtre* and film makers (producers and actors) in and out of Cape Town, and twenty tree women and men fans of *théâtres* in Cape Town. Interviews had the following objectives: reconstructing some elements of the history of Congolese films through oral testimonies and exploring the dynamics of genre and meaning-making practices, especially in the diaspora. I carried out three kinds of interviews:

a) *Film producers*. I inquired about the producers' inspiration in their choice of themes, how they found their productions and their audience (in the DRC and in the diaspora). Knowing how they see their cinema compared to other African films such as those of Nollywood and Swahiliwood was also very important in understanding their films as a vehicle of Congolese-ness and how inclusive or otherwise they are with regards to Congolese people in general. I also needed to know their aims in targeting the diaspora as one of their most important audiences and the specific messages (the obvious and the hidden) these films have for Congolese diaspora. I was also interested in how *théâtre* makers rate their own productions in relation to other African films and how *théâtres* are influenced by other African local and diasporic films.

b) *Actors*. When I interviewed Congolese actors I inquired about why they chose to play. I was interested in knowing whether they do it to become famous in the country and abroad or to meet their needs.<sup>27</sup> For Congolese actors in South Africa, I asked how they compare themselves and their acting to actors who are in the DRC, on the one hand, and to their primary audience, on the other.

c) *Diasporic audience*. I interviewed a number of Congolese immigrants in Cape Town. I selected people from different backgrounds, ages, ethnic groups and religious beliefs. I took care to balance the number of Swahili and Lingala speaking in Cape Town in order to get information good enough to support my argument regarding the two groups being in conflict concerning the Congolese (diasporic) identity. I was interested in knowing what kind of films/*théâtres* they watch, why they watch them, how they obtain them and what they learn from them; and whether they prefer films that are produced by the diaspora or those produced in the DRC. I also asked

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<sup>27</sup> According to Bony Beya, many actors chose to volunteer in his *Mzansi Fo Sho* just to be seen in the video by their friends and relative in the DRC. They did not care much about being paid but rather being famous was their first excitement.

the most pertinent question –how *théâtres* speak to the politics of the country. I was as well interested in knowing whether they were watching Congolese *théâtres* before they came to South Africa, and about their own sense of comparison between Zairian and post-Mobutu era *théâtres*, most importantly, how they relate to what they see in *théâtres* as Congolese.

I conducted both face-to-face and telephonic/online interviews especially with those in the DRC and *théâtre* producers of other diaspora; some of these interviews were recorded.

I chose to interview all kinds of Congolese as I tried to include all categories for more balanced information. I include therefore people of different ages, professions and religious backgrounds. I also considered the fact that Congolese people draw on differences among themselves even when they live abroad. For this matter, I needed to hear what people of different ethnic groups, or at least different regions/provinces of DRC have to say about *théâtres* and how they speak to Congolese identity. The answers I got were indispensable in supporting one of the major arguments I made based on the question of Congolese identity and those who claim it the most.

I also consulted with other Africans, mainly those from other Francophone countries, in order to gather what they know about Congolese films and how they help them understand Congolese identity. I precisely wanted to hear what image of Congolese other people get from watching *théâtres*. I was also interested in hearing what people think of the talent of Congolese as actors and producers compared to other African film makers, such as those produced in Nigeria (Nollywood), Tanzania (Swahiliwood), Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Bourkina Fasso and in the Magreb.

### ***Challenges***

There are many difficulties associated with research on Congolese films. There are many visual sources; however, they do not provide all the information necessary to approach the study of Congolese films. One of the main challenges is that the videos provide little to no information on their producers and the time of their productions. I interviewed actors and viewers of *théâtres*; however, not all of this information was very precise. Even Rock Bokabela, one of the best and most famous actors of *théâtres* could not provide exact information on when some of the best known *théâtres* (in which he played leading roles) were produced: he has forgotten. Some of the

answers I got from asking about when a certain *théâtre* was made consisted of something along the lines of “not really sure but it must be between 2009 and 2010...”<sup>28</sup> The themes treated in a *théâtre* can help in estimating the period in which it was produced, but obviously this method has its shortcomings. Some *théâtres* were dedicated to a new music album or political discourses, which helps in estimating when they were produced. For example, with the *théâtre* “*Cinq Chantiers*” it is easy to estimate the time of its production which can only be after 2006. *Cinq Chantiers* refers to the promise that Joseph Kabila made to Congolese during 2006 elections. This included building infrastructures and facilities which are: water and electricity, infrastructures, education and health, housing and employment. None of these has ever been realised. Congolese often make the joke of “*cinq chantiers*” to refer to false promises and dishonesty.

At the end of nearly every Congolese *théâtre* we find the part called *dedicace* (“dedication”), where actors thank all those who supported them, sometimes by sending them some wishes. They mention their producers and their financial supporters in the country and outside the country. The *dedicace* part can also provide information about when a *théâtre* was produced and by whom and, most importantly, who sponsored it.

Given this difficulty that is part of the object of research itself, I will not be able to provide all the exact dates for the *théâtres* discussed in this thesis –I can only say that they were all produced in the post-Mobutu era, most of them between 2000 and 2011; this shortcoming did not appear as important, especially because this thesis focuses more on the question of Congolese identity and how *théâtres* portray it.

Knowing the real names of Congolese actors is another difficulty that I encountered. The main reason for this is that most actors tend to valorise their stage names more than their real names. Even during the *dedicace* actors speak about themselves using their stage names and they use the same names when addressing their fans. Some actors use their real names as stage names, but, mostly, the stage names replace the actors’ names when they introduce themselves to the radio, TV, press and other media when they know that their fans would be listening. Bony Beya thinks that the main reason for this is that some actors care a lot about the characters they play,

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<sup>28</sup> Online interview with Rock Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.



fame comes before everything else. Therefore, I am mostly working with actors' stage names but I am also mentioning the real names when available.

It was often difficult for my interviewees to openly discuss the political meanings of *théâtres*. Even in South Africa, Congolese are very careful about what they say to “strangers” when it comes to their views on the country’s politics and leadership, especially in front of a voice recorder – and I qualified as a “stranger” on many accounts, because of my position as a scholar. Most people from DRC who live in South Africa are refugees and some come from war zones such as East of DRC. They were willing to grant me an interview but they kept asking “why do you have to record it?” or “what if someone uses what we say against us?” Another common concern that I heard came from Swahili speaking people from East of DRC, who said, *mtu hajuwake* (“we never know”) as they openly displayed their doubts on who I was and what I was going to do with the information I recorded, despite the fact that I explained everything to them before switching the recorder on.

Most of my interviewees were excited to answer my questions about Congolese films, but when I explained that I needed to record the interview, they said that they would only answer certain questions. But once the recorder was off, they went back to the subject and added more information, which was often the most important. For those who did not want to have their voices recorded, I have respected their wishes by simply taking note of our conversations. Listening while taking notes was enough to grasp the important information; I could interrupt the conversation to take note of a sentence, which they allowed unconditionally.

All the interviews with *théâtre* producers were recorded. Unlike *théâtre* viewers, *théâtre* makers seemed to not have any problem with recorded interviews after I explained to them that I needed some information to write on *théâtres*. The reason might be that they found that my writing could also serve as means to advertise their groups, *théâtres*, or themselves as fame is something most people in *théâtres* industry crave for. *Théâtres* producers were very kind in replying to my emails and granted me interviews on skype and cellphones despite the fact that they did not know me and they were busy. Some of them still call me to provide more information or to ask how my writing is going.

The question regarding how one gets his films/*théâtres* was also one that many people struggled to answer in front of a voice recorder. This is because most of my interviewees in Cape Town are aware of the prohibition on piracy through which most of them obtain their *théâtres*.

Most of them admitted that they buy their films from “someone” who makes copies for a cheap price. They could comfortably say that only when the voice recorder was switched off.

## **Thesis outline**

Chapter 1, *Historicity, Production, Themes*, looks at *théâtres* from an historical point of view. It begins from the early history of Congolese films – visualities and images during the early Leopoldian epoch – until *théâtres* produced in post-Mobutu era. The chapter relies mostly on Katrien Pype’s numerous publications. The chapter also discusses the productions, sponsorship and themes of the *théâtres* as a particular genre in Congolese cinema.

Chapter 2, *Théâtres and Congolese Diasporic Identity*, deals with the lives of Congolese of diaspora. It starts with a short review of the literature on Congolese migration to South Africa, then it looks at what a *mikiliste* identity entails and how both local and diasporic *théâtres* portray it.

Chapter 3, *Théâtres Reception and Congolesehood in Cape Town*, deals with the main findings of my research on Congolese diaspora of Cape Town and *théâtre* reception. I discuss the information collected in interviews and conversations with Congolese of Cape Town in order to find out how they relate to *théâtres* produced in *mikili* and “home” on *mikilistes* (whom they are). I also discuss the Swahili diaspora of Cape Town and their views on how they feel about Lingala *théâtres* including them as Congolese from other places than Kinshasa.

Finally, a conclusion sums up my main arguments.



# Chapter 1: Historicity, Production, Themes

## 1.1 Historical Background

### *Colonialism and Visuality (late 1800s-early 1960s)*

The origin of film in Africa has been attributed to colonialism. According to Shaka, films were introduced in Anglophone Africa after World War II. These films were meant to achieve modernisation and development in the colonies, as they were seen as tools to teach colonised subjects whose majority was illiterate.<sup>29</sup> Belgians applied similar methods in their colonies. Shaka argues that Belgian colonialists were willing to train their subjects in filmmaking and film techniques while their counter-parts in Anglophone colonies did not want to share this knowledge with their subjects.<sup>30</sup>

Although the notion of cinema was introduced to Africa by colonialists who made it one of their most efficient tools of their missions, we know that the notion of performance in Africa existed long before the colonial encounter. Based on the genealogy of dramas in ancient Europe, some scholars have argued that *théâtre*, in the sense of communication through performance, existed in pre-colonial Africa. The performance included rituals accompanied by songs, dance and some other kind of symbolic actions.<sup>31</sup> But it is a matter of debate among scholars whether these African traditional pre-colonial performances and rituals can be accredited as dramas or indigenous *théâtre*, given that some reject them as not meeting the criterion of the western idea or definition of dramas/performance which include “linear plot structure, specialized visual adornments, linguistic contents, impersonation of characters,…”<sup>32</sup> My own view is that African pre-colonial rituals are the roots of African *théâtres* and should not be left out in the history of African cinema.

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<sup>29</sup> F. O. Shaka, *Modernity and The African Cinema. A Study in Colonialist Discourse, Postcolonialist and Modern African Identities* (Trenton and Asmara, African World Press, Inc. 2004), 280.

<sup>30</sup> Shaka, *Modernity and The African Cinema*, 301.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance L. Losambe and D. Sarinjeive, *Pre-colonial and Post-colonial Drama and Theatre in Africa* (South Africa: New Africa Books, 2001), 40-45 and D. Kerr “Participatory Popular Theatre: The Highest Stage of Cultural Under-Development?” *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 22, no. 3 (Indiana University Press, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> Losambe and Sarinjeive, *Pre-colonial and Post-colonial*.

Photography originates in the Congo Free State in the late 1880s during King Leopold II's brutal regime where he used "torture, murder and other inhuman methods to compel the Congolese to abandon their ways of life to produce or to do whatever the colonial state required of them"<sup>33</sup>. While a lot of photographs were taken to show the hard work of King Leopold II, other images were being produced at the same time to expose Leopold II's brutality and inhuman treatment that was carried out by colonial settlers and officials.<sup>34</sup> The Baptist Missionary Service (BMS) which established itself in the Congo in 1883 was the first to capture photographs to expose King Leopold II's brutality and terrorism in the Congo Free State.<sup>35</sup> The BMS's work in the Congo was made difficult because of their interference with Leopold II's business of transforming Congolese indigenous into forced labour. The BMS managed to expose to the world images of people whose hands were chopped off especially during the infamous period of rubber plantations.<sup>36</sup>

From as early as 1910, films were projected in the Belgian Congo by Catholic priests in Leopoldville (now Kinshasa). Father Alexand Van Heul and Andre Cornil or both belonging to the Scheut Congregation – are remembered for producing early missionary films in the late 1940s in Congo.<sup>37</sup> Educational films were financed and produced by Belgian government to support their *mission civilisatrice* ("civilising mission"). Through films, natives were educated on hygiene, prevention of tropical diseases, agricultural methods and wage labour. Cine-Photo was the first office where these kinds of films were produced.<sup>38</sup>

According to Pype, "the Catholic mission laid the foundations of the Congolese modern cinema and television serials"<sup>39</sup>. After BMS exposed Leopold II, Catholic missions became his most favoured collaborators, and he gave them all the support they needed for their missionary work.<sup>40</sup> Newly converted Christian pupils were asked to perform religious *théâtres*. Katikiro is

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<sup>33</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 20.

<sup>34</sup> For example the photographs in Carl De Keyser and Johan Lagae; *Congo Belge en images*. (Uitgeverij Lannoo nv, Tielt, 2010)

<sup>35</sup> K. Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa," *Studies in World Christianity*. Vol. 15, ISSN 1354-9901 2009, 134-135.

<sup>36</sup> Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa."

<sup>37</sup> Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa," 137.

<sup>38</sup> Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa."

<sup>39</sup> Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa," 135.

<sup>40</sup> Pype, "Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa."

one a well-known early performance by Christian pupils in Kinshasa in the late 1920s.<sup>41</sup> The Katikiro play was about a young Christian converted and how he had to renounce his old ways such as the belief in traditions. Katikoro was directed by Monsignor de la Kethule,<sup>42</sup> the same man who built the first two bigger football stadiums in Kinshasa and who trained Kinshasa youth, especially those involved in gang and other sort of violent behaviour. De la Kethule found a way to encourage youngsters in Kinshasa to join the boy scout music bands in schools also for the benefit of the government.<sup>43</sup>

According to Gondola, in 1951, the catholic missionaries in the Belgian Congo broadcasted more films than private companies and the colonial state combined.<sup>44</sup> However, Catholic missionaries were not the only ones to use films to teach or instruct their adepts. In fact, local Congolese religious leaders used *théâtres* and performance as well. Pype explains that at the beginning of the 1950s, *théâtre* performances by Christian missions in the Belgian Congo were also believed to have been inspired by Congolese local Christian leader Simon Kimbangu, the founder of Kimbanguist religious movement, who used performance to preach to his followers. It appears that his methods worked successfully in increasing his adepts. The Catholic missions adopted the same method to get people converted to and back to Christianity as many started leaving Catholic to join Kimbanguism.<sup>45</sup>

From 1955, dramas were performed in schools and were used to evangelise the city. Here, we note that Catholic missions also “monopolised” education in the Belgian Congo.<sup>46</sup> Film industry was established in the DRC (then Belgian Congo) in 1947 by the Belgian Ministry of Information. This film industry was called Film and Photo Bureau and it was inspired by the Bantu Educational Cinema Experiment and the Colonial Film Unit (CFU).<sup>47</sup> Its aim was to provide Africans with their own films and to produce documentaries and newsreels for Belgium.

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<sup>41</sup> Pype explains that there is a debate in regard to when Katikiro was performed. Some scholars say it was performed from 1925 to 1926 while others maintain that it was performed in early 1930s. See footnote 9 of Pype’s *Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa. Studies in World Christianity*. 2009

<sup>42</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 135.

<sup>43</sup> D. Gondola, “Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence and Masculinity Among the Young Bills of Kinshasa,” *Afrique & histoire*, 2009, 80.

<sup>44</sup> Gondola, “Tropical Cowboys,” 80.

<sup>45</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 135.

<sup>46</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 135.

<sup>47</sup> Shaka, *Modernity and The African Cinema*, 169-170.

In the same period, the Catholic Church in the Belgian Congo has established its own centre of production, the Congolese Centre for Catholic Action Cinema (CCCAC) which was based in Kinshasa (then Leopoldville) but with representative branches in Katanga and Kivu.<sup>48</sup> According to Shaka, both the Film and Photo Bureau and the CCCAC ended their productions when DRC got its independence in 1960.

In the late 1950s, *théâtres* were used not only as a way of converting people but also to transform them in *evolués*. This Congolese local elite group which emerged in the decade before the independence is well known in the history of the struggle against colonialism. They were intellectuals, Christians and “civilised”. Their ambitions included having a life of a white person of that time. They organised debates with different themes including economy, education, hygiene, etc. They wrote their own newspaper “*La Voix du Congolais*”<sup>49</sup>. During their meetings, they could entertain themselves with “*théâtres*”. Those who performed were people among themselves, the “*evolués*”.<sup>50</sup>

“*La Voix du Congolais*” initiated and organised contests to encourage *théâtre* writing. One can argue that it is at this time that Congolese proper *théâtre* emerged. For the first time, Congolese themselves could write their plays, write their own stories, set their own dramas, and create their own shows with less or no involvement of white colonialists.<sup>51</sup> The inspiration came from social life, especially the cultural clash that Pype explains as “the psychological doubts of living in multiple worlds”. According to Pype, this conflict was to be resolved by using the Christian ways of “perfection” and by referring to “colonial culture”.<sup>52</sup>

As time went on, Congolese dramas moved from being strictly instructive to a complete “tool of leisure and entertainment” although it was still under missionaries’ supervision. *Théâtres* became less religious as other elements of popular culture were slowly made part of the *théâtre* performance such as traditional dance and popular music. They began being broadcast on radio and later, on television.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Shaka, *Modernity and The African Cinema*, 170.

<sup>49</sup> It can be translated in English as “Voice of a Congolese”

<sup>50</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 136.

<sup>51</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 136.

<sup>52</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 136

<sup>53</sup> Pype, “Historical Routes Towards Religious Television Fiction in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” 137

### *The Mobutu Era (1960s – 1990s)*

In the late 1960s, Mobutu became the president of Congo. Mobutu's reign was one of terror. His dictatorship extended from political sphere to the popular culture of Congolese. Musicians had to be careful about what to sing and so did those who were involved in acting. Many feared for their lives and so, popular culture had to develop in a way that will not make it subject of Mobutu's suspicion. For example, in 1966, just a year after he became the president, he ordered a public hanging of "four prominent leaders" for unknown reasons.<sup>54</sup> In 1969, there was a massacre of university students demonstrating in Kinshasa and in 1971, university students of Kinshasa and Lubumbashi were forced to enroll in the army simply because they commemorated the 1969 massacre. In 1992, Christian protesters were massacred as they were demanding the reopening of the National Conference.<sup>55</sup> Of course, Mobutu had managed to manipulate some elements of popular culture to make them serve his own interest such as to make people even more subjected to him through what was known as *animations politiques*, consisting of singing and dancing for Mobutu. This was done under the well-known Mobutu's political discourse of *recours à l'authenticité* ("recourse to authenticity"), in which he manipulated cultural values including songs, dance, the way of dressing, names in one's mother tongue, etc. to suit his political desires.<sup>56</sup>

Mobutu nationalised not only the press but also the Catholic TV channels. According to Pype, Radio Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC) began in 1965. Téléstar, one of the Catholic TV channels in Congo in the 1960s was also nationalised and it changed the name to RTNC2. In 1971, it became known as La Voix du Zaïre. In 1981, it changed again to Office Zaïrois de Radiodiffusion et de Télévision (OZRT).<sup>57</sup> After changing the names of these TV channels, Mobutu made sure that all of them served his political agenda mainly, his

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<sup>54</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo*, 172

<sup>55</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo From Leopold to Kabila*, 172

<sup>56</sup> For more on "animation politiques", see White, B., L'incroyable machine d'authenticite. L'animation politique et l'usage public de la culture dans le Zaïre de Mobutu. *Anthropology et Societe*, vol. 30, no 2, 2006, 52-59.

<sup>57</sup> K. Pype, "The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios. TV Fiction, Culture, and Transnational Flows in Postcolonial Kinshas," in *The International Encyclopedia of Media Studies*. Edited by Angharad . Valdivia: Blackwell Publishing Ltd 2013, 7.

nationalisation ideas. He did so by controlling all the TV shows and also by promoting shows such as *télédramatique* that showed support to his nationalisation.<sup>58</sup>

The infamous *animations culturelles* discussed by both Pype and White are still well remembered by those who served Mobutu in the 1970s and 1980s. Traditional songs and dance were performed as part of cultural animations which in fact were to honour, praise and celebrate Mobutu. Maman Thérèse who lived in Kinshasa in the 1970s and 1980s recalls that even governors, ministers, doctors, etc. were to sing and dance traditional songs composed for Mobutu before they start their days at work. One of these songs was *Elombe Sese tokolanda* (“(he mighty Sese we will follow”) and *Lokuta monene! lokuta monene! Baye balobaki, MPR ekofufa oya...* (“it is a big lie! it is a big lie! Those who said MPR will die oya...”).<sup>59</sup> She also recalls that Mobutu would make his ministers and other cadres of the country dance for him before he starts any kind of meeting. Maman Thérèse also reveals that *les animateurs sociaux* who included men and women, earned more than school teachers in late 1970s and 1980s. In White’s words, “ordinary citizens saw themselves obliged to express, with their bodies, a loyalty to a regime which they very well knew was corrupted”.<sup>60</sup>

While these forms of “animations” (political or cultural) were used by Mobutu and his supporters as a way of “promoting national unity”, some have concluded that these animations were a form of “humiliation” and “proof of a failure of a reciprocal relationship between the state and his subjects”.<sup>61</sup> It is in this very same atmosphere that the first well known Congolese *groupe théâtral* was created: the *Groupe Salongo* created in 1974 by Kitenge Nsana<sup>62</sup> and Masavani Sesevi Seva.<sup>63</sup> It seems that the choice of the name of the group, *Salongo* was itself carefully chosen to please Mobutu, who used the word as one of his majestic slogans, meaning “working together for national development”.<sup>64</sup> Pastor Joseph remembers that in the 1980s Saturdays were *salongo* days. The *chefs de quartiers* (neighbourhood chiefs) were to supervise the work. At least every household was to participate in the collective work which included cutting grasses,

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<sup>58</sup> Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 7.

<sup>59</sup> The song is also performed in *Mobutu King of Zaire* (1999), a documentary by Thierry Michel.

<sup>60</sup> White, “L’incroyable machine d’authenticite,” 57(my translation).

<sup>61</sup> White, “L’incroyable machine d’authenticite,” 57(my translation).

<sup>62</sup> Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 8.

<sup>63</sup> From <http://www.infosociale.org/evangeliste.html>; accessed on 24 October 2012.

<sup>64</sup> For more on Salongo, see Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 8-9.



removing mud and other dirt to unblock the road pavement in order for rain water to flow normally, etc. The main idea was that such practice would help keep the environment clean to help prevent diseases such as malaria, cholera and other related diseases.<sup>65</sup> According to Pype, *Groupe Salongo* under Nsana (writer, director and producer) performed serials based on the everyday of Congolese. One of the serials they produce is *Mwana Nsusu*<sup>66</sup> with weekly episodes each inspired by the everyday reality. Given its success and popularity, *Mwana Nsusu* serial is described as a “turning point” not only for *Groupe Salongo* but also in Congolese *théâtres* in general.<sup>67</sup> In the 1980s, the group *Minzoto Wela Wela* emerged along with the Trio *Dafuta*,<sup>68</sup> *Nzoi* and *Ngadiadia*<sup>69</sup>.

Given that there were a lot of injustices and malfunctions related to governance in Zaire, people feared for their lives and clearly avoided talking about it publicly and even less in *théâtres*. *Théâtres* in DRC during Mobutu and even in Post-Mobutu do not clearly speak against the government or international employers or even religions (missionaries). In contrast, they tended to focus more on “domestic affairs” especially during the hard times of Mobutu’s dictatorship.<sup>70</sup> For example, they could deal with the issues the elders’ control over youngsters, what is well known as *conflits de générations* (generational conflict). They could also focus on the way women have been always considered as inferior to men or the conflict in marriage, materialism, perversions due to civilisation, occult practices, etc. Perhaps the most notable characteristic of Congolese *théâtres* during Mobutu’s era is the absence of “divine intervention” in the story – the latter being a post-Mobutu phenomenon in Congolese *théâtres*.<sup>71</sup>

### ***The post-Mobutu Era (1998-2011)***

Mobutu’s reign of terror was put to an end by Laurent Kabila. However, peace did not last as Kabila’s “liberation” came with its own issues. Since 1998, the DRC has been in war with its

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Sometimes pronounced *Mwana Soso* (baby chicken)

<sup>67</sup> Pype, *The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios*, 8.

<sup>68</sup> *Lordy is an independent journalist who keeps himself anonymous. He wrote a short history of Congolese théâtres entitled Theatre Congolais: Histoire. From <http://www.infosociale.org/evangeliste.html>; accessed on 24 October 2012.*

<sup>69</sup> Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 8.

<sup>70</sup> Pype, “Audience Participation and Performance in the Production of Kinshasa’s Television Serials,” 30.

<sup>71</sup> Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 9.

neighbouring countries including Rwanda, Burundi, and Uganda. The DRC has become the centre of interest of the global politics because of its natural resources.<sup>72</sup> It also seems that the presence of international organizations in the DRC has failed to stop the war, resource looting, killings, rapes and other forms of human rights violation that have been going on there for over a decade.<sup>73</sup> The east of the country has been particularly affected since 1998, when Laurent Kabila and his collaborators who helped him to get rid of Mobutu did not reach a satisfying agreement.<sup>74</sup> The killings and other forms of violence in the DRC have captured international medias' attention but the situation has remained desperately unsolved. Local media have reported the situation but the state seems eager to control them and so, it always finds a way of shutting them down; there is a limitation in what is known as freedom of expression. In the East of the country, journalists and human rights activists have lost their lives by assassination and many believe that it has to do with the way in which they spoke out against what has been happening in the country including rape, resource looting and the way the current government rules the country in general.<sup>75</sup> Journalists such as Serges Maheshe, Chebeya, Didace Namujimbo, just to name a few, have lost their lives because of their involvement in human right activism. Others – such as Denis Mukwege and Wamba Dia Wamba a have risked their lives and were threatened to be killed for different reasons, connected with the control that the state has over media.

The failure to put an end to the above mentioned problems led many Congolese to think of them as a “spiritual problem” that only God can end.<sup>76</sup> It was mostly at the turn of the millennium that charismatic churches in DRC especially in Kinshasa boomed. These churches created many new born-again Christians who had to testify their faith and preach their new beliefs on televisions, radios, streets, markets, etc. All was made easy with the opportunity given to any person with his means to open his own TV channel after the fall of Mobutu. Pype's recent research discloses that one needs only USD25,000 and a permission from the state authorities to open his own TV channel.<sup>77</sup> Pastors or Prophets of the new charismatic churches, also have their own TV channels. Their shows focus on what they believe can help to achieve a Christian

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<sup>72</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo*, 214-240.

<sup>73</sup> Tuner, *The Congo Wars: Conflict, Myth and Reality*, 146-164.

<sup>74</sup> Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo*, 214-240.

<sup>75</sup> See articles on Ota Benga Foundation website ([www.otabenga.org](http://www.otabenga.org))

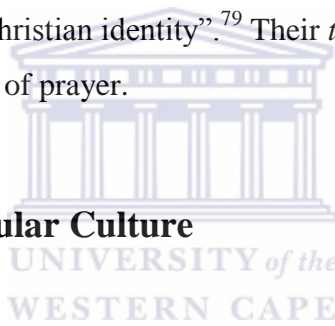
<sup>76</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>77</sup> Pype, “The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios,” 10.



maturity like *témoignages* (Christian testifying) such as a witch who explains how God has changed him/her into a faithful Christian. These channels also show Nigerian films that show the triumph of divine forces over the Devil's. They focus on the power of prayer and the importance of going to a "man of God" to ask for deliverance. The way Nigerian pastors perform miracles and exorcism is also learned by Congolese Prophets through Nigerian Christian films and sometimes, these Prophets/Pastors travel to Nigeria to learn their ways of praying.<sup>78</sup> TB Joshua Church channel has been very inspiring for Kinshasa's *Eglises de Réveil* (charismatic churches).

With churches and Christian TV channels that seek to evangelise the country, religious *théâtres* groups have emerged to even reinforce Christian education. Some of these groups include Cinarc, Les Evangélistes, and Les Lévites. These groups work with and for Christian TV channels and are affiliated to a Charismatic church. Actors must have a good reputation of a true Christian and together they must work to preserve the reputation of the group so they can convince their audience of their "Christian identity".<sup>79</sup> Their *théâtres* are shown on these channels to show people the power of prayer.



## 1.2. Cross-Influences in Popular Culture

Congolese *Théâtres* emerged in the wake of other Congolese forms of popular culture – including music, dance, fashion (*la sape*) and popular paintings: they should thus be understood in this broader context.<sup>80</sup> Like these other forms of popular culture, Congolese *théâtres* are made "to make public what has been silenced and denied access by state-controlled media," as argued by Meyer on Ghanaian pentecostal cinema.<sup>81</sup> *Théâtres* also expose the ongoing failure of Congolese leadership while showing the means used by "ordinary" Congolese to overcome their

<sup>78</sup> Pype, "The Comings and Goings of Key Scenarios," 10.

<sup>79</sup> See *Ibid* and Pype, "Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa," 546.

<sup>80</sup> For music see for example White, B., *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu's Zaire* (United States of America: Duke University Press, 2008); and White, B., "Congolese Rumba and Other Cosmopolitanisms." *Cahiers d'Études Africaines*, vol. 42, no 168 (2002); Wa Mukuwa, K., "The Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo during the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Decades (1975-1995) of the Second Republic –Zaire," *African Music*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1999); Stewart, G. *Rumba on the river. A history of the popular music of the two Congos* (London & New York, 2000), just to name a few.

<sup>81</sup> B. Meyer, "Praise the Lord": Popular Cinema and Pentecostalite Style in Ghana's New Public Sphere. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2004), 105.

multiple crises that are mainly associated with the politics of the country. *Théâtres* are used by people both socially and politically, even though the latter is usually “avoided” to avoid conflict with the state.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, coded language is used to speak against the authorities and the numerous crises the country has been experiencing since the so called war of liberation that started in the late 1990s.

Congolese Music, dance and fashion have gained a transnational fame through *théâtres* especially among Congolese diaspora. This is seen through the number of *théâtres* made to promote and advertise dance and new music albums.<sup>83</sup> These publicities are requested and sponsored by musicians. Both *théâtres* and music are mainly produced in the capital, Kinshasa and mostly use Lingala as their favourite language. The latter is considered as the language of popular culture in the DRC given its popularity and the value it was given during Mobutu’s reign. It was also the language spoken by the Congolese army in the entire country until Laurent Kabila came to power and valued Kiswahili.

Music and *théâtres* have common themes which also influence each other. Wa Mukuna has written that in the 1980s, Congolese famous musicians could not turn a blind eye to the hardship that Mobutu regime created in the country. Given that Mobutu’s Zaire was not a place where one could make use of freedom of expression, music had to find a way of dealing with this critical period which wa Mukuna terms “a period of desperation,”<sup>84</sup> characterised by many crises, especially at economical level. In this period, musicians composed songs with main themes of the lyrics being “the power of prayer for deliverance” based on religious (Christian) ideas; “call for stronger relations” with painful lyrics hidden in the forms of love and deceptions and the pain it causes; and finally, “misery” itself.<sup>85</sup>

In this condition was produced the first well-known and successful Congolese film, *La Vie Est Belle* (1987), starring musicians such as Papa Wemba, Pepe Kale, and Emoro. Wa Mukuna explains that Papa Wemba is one of those musicians who attempted to add a plus to his music career after the criticism made regarding the way great Congolese musicians whose contributions

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<sup>82</sup> White, “Congolese Rumba and other cosmopolitanisms,” 663.

<sup>83</sup> Here we think of theatres such as *Le jour le plus long*, *Sima ekoli*, *Malewa*, just to name a few.

<sup>84</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 78-9.

<sup>85</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 79.

have been almost indispensable for the development of Congolese urban music “have ended their careers and lives in miseries”, which could not have happened if “they have diversified”.<sup>86</sup>

Around the same year, *Operette Takinga*, a musical *théâtre*, became very successful because of the way all conversation were made in songs, and the dance, not to mention the costumes but mostly the story which is extremely funny. *Operette Takinga* is about a man called Takinga who falls in love with a very beautiful woman, Mukandeya. He wants to marry her but her father refused any kind of dowry. He wanted to marry his daughter only to a man brave enough to accept to be buried with him when he dies. Takinga was to lay alive in his father-in-law’s coffin to support his dead body in the tomb. He accepted to marry the woman by accepting the condition but he warned his in-laws to always remember that his name was Takinga Azongaka Sima Te (“Takinga, the one who does not turn back”). When his father-in-law died, he was to honour his words by accepting to be buried alive with him. However, when he laid in the coffin, he was taller and could not fit in properly. He was asked to get out of it so they could enlarge it. He got out but when he was asked to return in it, he sang “...na biki na liwa...Kombo na ngai Takinga-Azongaka Sima te...” (“I have been saved from death...my name is Takinga, The one who does not turn back”).<sup>87</sup> *Operette Takinga* and *La Vie Est Belle* are the best two examples that clearly illustrate the symbiosis of Congolese music and cinema.

African films in general have also been very influential in the development of Congolese *théâtres*. From the late 1990s, African films from Nigeria, Tanzania and Francophone West Africa were widely diffused in Zaire and can be considered as one of major inspirers of Congolese *théâtres*. According to Bony Beya, *théâtres* have been also influenced by West African television serials such as *Ma Famille* (Côte d’Ivoire), *Bobodiouf* and *Kadi Jolie* (Burkina Faso), while Congolese films look up to Nigerian films or the “excellency of Hollywood”.<sup>88</sup> Rock Bokabela, a Congolese *théâtre* producer, director, and actor in Kinshasa, also confirmed that *théâtres* produced from 2000 onwards are highly inspired and influenced by Nigerian films. Bokabela explains that the popularity of Nigerian films that he believes is acquired through the stories of the everyday life of their societies is the main reason why they tend to be considered as

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<sup>86</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 75-76.

<sup>87</sup> A 1980s theatre, also known as “Takinga azongaka sima te” (Takinga does not go backward).

<sup>88</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

the model by *théâtres* producers.<sup>89</sup> Either way, both *théâtres* producers recognised the impact of other African films in the development of Congolese films in general and *théâtres* in particular.

Nollywood films are believed to have out produced both Hollywood and Bollywood film industries.<sup>90</sup> The success of this Nigerian and now the first African film industry is mainly due to the quantity of films they produce annually and the way they are consumed not only in Africa but also in Europe and America especially among African diaspora. Themes of Nollywood films include witchcraft, conspiracy, corruption, love, power, and treachery, just to name a few.<sup>91</sup> These themes are the ones that Congolese *théâtres* engage with not only because they speak to Congolese viewers, but also because Congolese *théâtre* makers are convinced that it is because of the above mentioned themes that Nollywood films have gained popularity. *Théâtres* also imitate Nollywood films by producing as many videos as they can. The influence of Charismatic churches in Nollywood films has been noted by *théâtres* producers.

### 1.3 Material and Social Aspects of Production

#### *Groups, names and actors*

Actors and producers who perform together form a “group” (*groupe théâtral*). New *théâtre* groups are created in Kinshasa almost every day. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect is the way *théâtre* groups change names as the actors and their producers engage in conflicts for various reasons. For instance, in early 2000s, the group Kilimanjaro was formed. They have produced very well-known *théâtres* such as *Soeur en crise* (sister in crises) and *Pona nini kaka ngai?* (why only me?). But then their producers had an argument; as a result, they decided to split, each going away with a certain number of actors.<sup>92</sup> The producer who took the majority of the best actors changed the name to Super Kilima. The last had the very same actors who performed

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<sup>89</sup> Online interview with Rock Bokabela, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>90</sup> “Nigeria’s “Nollywood” film industry outproduces Hollywood,” *HTimes Live*, 14 July 2012. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2012/07/14/nigeria-s-nollywood-film-industry-outproduces-hollywood> (accessed on 17 October 2013).

<sup>91</sup> “Nigeria’s “Nollywood” film industry outproduces Hollywood,” *HTimes Live*, 14 July 2012. <http://www.timeslive.co.za/africa/2012/07/14/nigeria-s-nollywood-film-industry-outproduces-hollywood> (accessed on 17 October 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Online interview with Rock Bokabela, a theatre producer, director, actor, and human right activist in Kinshasa, 2 July 2013.

before under the name of Kilimanjaro. At the same time, other *théâtres* were produced with the same actors under the name of group Nyiragongo which produced *théâtres* such as *Faux Calcul* (wrong calculation) (2008) and *Ma Soeur* (my sister).<sup>93</sup> Another reason for a *théâtres* group changing name is to attract more audience as it is assumed that the name given to the group can be an important determinant in increasing the audience and circulation. For example, the group Evangélique and CINARC were meant to attract Christian audience in Kinshasa given that many people are interested in religious *théâtres* as most of their themes are mere imitations of the Nigerian religious films, which focus on the fight between the evil and the good (divine forces), as mentioned earlier.<sup>94</sup>

*Théâtres* which focus on extreme comedy also chose their group names that refer to their themes. For example, the group Les Attaquants du Rire (laughter strikers), which uses the majority of those who performed under the group *Les Princes du Rire* (Princes of laughter), including well-known actors such as Charli Nongi (Vue de Loin), Kobo Ndombele (Bidibidi), Getou Memunga (maman Eyenga), and Adolphe Lombala (Paka Lowi). Those are the well-known comedians and who also happen to be the favourite of the diaspora since 2004.<sup>95</sup> Some of the above mentioned actors such as Lombala (Paka Lowi) have been part of the group Kilimanjaro, where they performed with well-known actors such as Rock Bokabela (Bodo) and Fatuma (Miracle). It seems, however, that knowing the group name matters less for *théâtres* consumers. They tend to focus more on who is acting. Those who sell *théâtres* usually first speak about the actors involved to market their products. For example, the person who used to sell *théâtres* to my flatmate would call and say “I have new *théâtres* starring Vue De Loin, Paka Lowi and Mbata Siala, that you will enjoy”. He has never mentioned anything about the *théâtre* group, and also rarely he would mention the title unless he thought it will positively impact on his selling. In fact, most of my interviewees seem to care less about the name of the group to which their favourite actors belong. Saying that the *théâtre* is new and that it features some well-known actors is enough to get the DVD sold.<sup>96</sup> For example, *Moscovitch* has been watched by almost every Congolese of Cape Town, the story and the title are known but Kin Malebo, the

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Rock Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>94</sup> Pype, “Media Celebrity,” 546-548.

<sup>95</sup> At least all my interviewees mentioned them as their favorite actors.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Paul, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

group that produced it, is not that famous for the audience. Kin Malebo also produced other well-known and successful *théâtres* such as *Mosinzo*, *Essobolo*, *Lifelo ya Mundele*, and *Fashion*, just to name a few. Most of my interviewees admitted that they know less about *théâtres* groups. They tend to remember the story, the main actors and the title of the *Théâtre*.

Other groups are named after comedians who, after playing a major role in a successful *théâtre* and becoming famous, leave the group to create their own groups under their names (usually their stage names). Group Sans Soucis is one of these groups. Mathieu Matondo became famous in the late 1980s after starring as one of the major actors in *Dialo Contre Sans Soucis* with the group *Salongo*. He left the group in the late 1990s to create his own group under the name of Sans Soucis, a name strategically chosen to attract the audience in the country as well as the Congolese diaspora. Mathieu Matondo died in 2009 and he is well-remembered as one of the legends of Congolese *théâtres*. Ngadiadia Ngadios is also a famous Congolese comedian whose *théâtres* are known as “Ngadiadia Ngadios *Théâtres*”. He is the main character of all of them; he conceives his stories and directs them in the way that suits himself and his audience which always expects something extremely funny.<sup>97</sup>

*Théâtre* groups are existent also in *mikili*. They are often named after the place where the *théâtres* are produced. For example, Diaspora de Jobourg is the name for the group which produced *Bango na Bango* (“them and themselves”<sup>98</sup>), *Na Pona Nani?* (“Who do I choose?”), and *Mabe Zéro* (“zero wrong”). Some *théâtres* include the name of the place where they were made as they try to be more explicit when posting it on Youtube; for example, the group JTM produced *Pitopale*. On Youtube it says: “Montreal nouveau Théâtre: Pitopale bana ya mitu makasi na poto” (Montreal new *Théâtre*: Pitopale: impossible children in poto/*mikili*).

### ***Locations of filming***

Locations are chosen based on the theme of the *théâtre*. Sometimes, beautiful locations are used to romanticise the beauty of the city, especially in Kinshasa. Ma Campagne and some other beautiful suburbs of Kinshasa are among locations used to show the beauty and wealth of the

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<sup>97</sup> Interview with Bakari Matondo, son of Mathieu Matondo and one the leading actors of Diaspora de Jobourg in theatre *Bango na Bango*.

<sup>98</sup> A literal translation. *Bango na Bango* refers to discrimination based on ethnic group. For example, if you are a Muluba, you will not get employed in a company managed by a Mukongo. He would rather employ another Mukongo.



city.<sup>99</sup> But more recently, ordinary houses in relatively poor suburbs were used to show the reality of Kin, especially in films made for diasporic consumption. It appears that fancy houses and hotels are given for free for filming while ordinary houses, in relatively poor locations, are usually paid for. Relatively rich people offer their properties, shops, hotels, etc. for filming locations as a way of promoting their businesses and “social status” just like for Nollywood films.<sup>100</sup> So, both *théâtres* and the donors of the locations benefit from each other, at least in one way or another.

*Baganda* are places where people drink and sometimes eat –<sup>101</sup> are also used as locations for filming. The owners make them available so as to make their places known, especially in terms of atmosphere and the kind and quality of services they offer. *Théâtres* prefer to use the terrace to attract attention of those walking around to join in the ambiance. The place and the owners are usually praised, their names are spoken in the form of *banganda*; the quality of the service and food is also mentioned; sometimes, few names of well-known people are spoken about as one of the regular customers of the place just to emphasise that it is not just any place but rather a place with “class” – in other words, a place where rich people like to sit, drink, eat and other kind of enjoyments.<sup>102</sup>

Most of the churches used or seen in *théâtres* are *Eglises de Réveil* or charismatic churches. It is very easy to set a place that will be called a church in *théâtre* just with few benches or some plastic chairs. This phenomenon is seen in *théâtres* such as *Essobolo* and *Soeur en Crise*. This shows that churches – which are created in DRC every day, particularly in Kinshasa – are so modest that many people believe that they have simply become a way of making income given the fact that unemployment, poverty, and other kinds of hardships especially in the capital have been thought to be reduced through “praying” and for this matter, the state of the venue matters less because “God is everywhere”.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Solange, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>100</sup> See Haynes “Nollywood in Lagos,” 138.

<sup>101</sup> Originally, the word meant a place for drinking. With time, people could buy some barbecue meat, fish, etc. For more on *nganda*, see Bazenguissa-Ganga, R. and MacGaffey, J., “Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law.” In *African Issues*, edited by De Wall, A. and Ellis, S., United State and Canada: Indiana University Press, 2000, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, a charismatic church pastor in Stellenbosch, Cape Town, 28 April 2013.

Although *théâtres* often portray Catholics and their churches, no scene has ever been actually shot in a catholic church. People in *théâtres* speak about their catholic religion like *La femme du patron* (“the boss’s wife”) in which Maman Nzita always prays the rosary and talks about herself as an active member of Legion of Mary (*maman légionnaire*). She mentions meetings and other activities related to Catholic Church but there is never a scene filmed in the Catholic Church. Koba, another well known actor also likes to mention his catholic religion by talking about Maman Maria and Rosary in *théâtres* such as *Essobolo* and *Lifelo ya Mundele*. ; However, when it comes to charismatic churches, the scene is shot in a church and shows people praying and other things they do in the church. These churches are set in *théâtres* sometimes in the way of encouraging people in joining them, sometimes in a way that speaks against them in order to warn people that they are not that reliable. But in one way or another, charismatic churches support *théâtres* by offering their venues for performances as a way of promoting divine education and as a means of making their praying places known.<sup>104</sup>

### ***Costuming, makeup and hairdressing***

Clothes are crucial in *théâtres*. This is largely reinforced with the notion of *la sape* to which almost every Congolese (in general) and *Kinois* (in particular) adhere.<sup>105</sup> While every actor wants to be remembered from the quality and brand of the clothes he/she wore in a *théâtre*, the shop owners want the audience to know the locations and the kind of merchandise they trade. So, actors benefit from not spending money in costume renting but in the meantime, these business owners once again gain free advertisement as the name of their shops, location and products are being shown inside and outside the country. Actors want to look beautiful for their friends in and outside the country and to attract more fans and of course more personal motives are behind the way actors dress especially for young single actors who are interested in creating more personal relationships locally and internationally.<sup>106</sup>

Makeup and coiffures are also very important for the actors and their appearance in the *théâtres*. Some use their personal makeup and pay to get their haircut or braided. Congolese filmmakers have come to understand that in other big film industries there is a department of

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28 April 2013.

<sup>105</sup> For more on *La sape*, see the documentary by papa Wemba and others (available on you tubes).

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Solange, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.



makeup, costumes, transport, etc. Congolese who have been in *mikili* know how to create jobs, simple jobs but which can provide the necessary for living. These Congolese are the ones who have come with the ideas of founding security companies, big hair saloon, beauty and spa businesses, etc. Even actors have come to understand that one needs a makeup specialist to make his appearance on TV even more unforgettable.

The fact that many actors use soaps and lotions to bleach their skins, especially to make their faces lighter in complexion, has generally badly impacted on their skins and so, they need a special make up to hide the side effect of this practice such as *tampons*<sup>107</sup> which are caused by *nchoko*.<sup>108</sup> Bleaching the skin has been observed among women of colour during colonial time. According to F. Fanon, in Martinique, women dreamed of being light in complexion so they could easily seduce white men. Being light in complexion or a *mulato* was believed to determine one's beauty and was associated with one having a white ancestor, something many were proud of at that time as it was an indicator that one was civilised in a sense of being close to whites.<sup>109</sup> This passion for a lighter complexion in the DRC emerged in the decade after the independence, especially from the 1970s and 1980s, with many women moving from rural to urban areas and engaging in competitions for finding a rich and "civilised" husband. It was believed that even those "civilised" and educated men who were already married, could not resist a lighter woman. The majority of women who were light in complexion were concubines/mistresses.<sup>110</sup> Even nowadays, Congolese men and women are well known for the way they bleach their skins. Actors who bleach their skins, especially those with *tampons*, require specialist makeup artists to help them hide their *tampons* using appropriate face mask and foundations.<sup>111</sup>

### ***Sponsorship***

According to White, the term sponsor "refers to a commercial or corporate entity that offers to assume some of the artist's professional expenses in exchange for the artist's endorsement of a particular service or product". White adds that the term could be applied to those individuals who

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<sup>107</sup> *Tampon* is a well-known concept for those who use products to bleach their skin. It is a dark mark mostly on cheeks which is caused by exaggeration in lighting skin complexion.

<sup>108</sup> *Nchoko* or *produit* is an excess of lightning skin using some unhealthy soaps and lotions and even some herbs. It can also refer to any product that is believed to help 'improve' complexion in making it lighter.

<sup>109</sup> F. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (France: Edition de Seuil, 1952), 32-34.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with maman Therese (Cape Twn, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013) and Solange (Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013)-

“contribute money in exchange for private access to the artist’s performance and private space and/or for some form of public recognition.”<sup>112</sup> This method – widespread in Congolese musical performance – has been used by *théâtre* producers and actors to sustain their works. The support of the diaspora helps in providing for actors, who largely depend on *mabanga* (see below) to make something from the *théâtres*, but the local contribution to *théâtre* production remains the most indispensable. Local support is mostly material and includes location for filming, cars and transport, costumes, makeup, hairdressing etc. : these are mostly provided for free.<sup>113</sup> Just like Nollywood films, Congolese *théâtres* are shot as fast as possible, as the locations are borrowed; sometimes, no change is allowed in the disposition of the furniture in the houses and hotels as the owner gives his/her own conditions for using his/her properties for filming.<sup>114</sup> Whether the Congolese government supports its actors is really vague; however, some donations are believed to have been made occasionally to some well-known actors.<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps the most noticeable support Congolese *théâtres* get locally is through forthcoming or newly-released music albums advertisement. There are *théâtres* made uniquely to promote new local music and dance. Musicians support actors and producers by paying them to do a *théâtre* dedicated to their new songs and dance of a coming or newly released album. For instance, *Le Jour le plus long* (“the longest day”) has been financed by musician Emeneya to make his new album by the same title known. The new music was played in the *théâtre*. The best dancers were to be rewarded by being taken to *mikili* as one of Emeneya’s dancers. The *théâtre* is an extreme comedy with retarded and physically disabled people – like well-known characters Pululu and his sister Buyibuyi also competing for the dance in order to go to *mikili*. Other *théâtres* financed by musicians include *Sima ekoli* and *Malewa* for Werrason’s album *Malewa*, and *Zokisa ngolo* for Koffi Olomide’s *Monde Arabe*. Some *théâtres* are totally – or to a large extent – supported by musicians. Sometimes a *théâtre* is about a story which has nothing to do with the music but still sometimes, they can show people dancing to a certain song, usually the full song or sometimes, just a part. This implies that the author of the song has given some financial support to the *théâtre*. It can also mean that the musician is a regular supporter of that

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<sup>112</sup> White, *Rumba Rules*, 170.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>114</sup> Haynes, “Nollywood in Lagos,” 138.

<sup>115</sup> For example, it is believed that once, President Joseph Kabila gave a car to actor Sai Sai because he entertained his daughter laugh at her birthday.

group; therefore, his music is played in the *théâtre* as a sign of gratitude and also to encourage the musician (s) to continue supporting the group.<sup>116</sup>

Crises in the DRC have affected the economy at all levels, including the cultural industry. Piracy and the lack of governmental support for the production of Congolese films have negatively impacted on Congolese cinema and its development. Musicians also suffer from piracy but at least they still benefit from their music mainly through live concerts.<sup>117</sup> Performance on stage is very rare for Congolese *théâtres* nowadays. On stage performance is usually done in schools, churches or in some special spectacles especially in places such as Kivu region where people still pay to enjoy onstage *théâtres*.<sup>118</sup> Actors who perform on stage are usually distinct from the actors of televised *théâtres*. They can be amateur actors or ordinary students, school children, women, etc. They perform for certain occasions such as Women Day, Christmas, Workers' day, etc. Like in the colonial time, onstage performance is still strongly linked to education and conscientisation.<sup>119</sup> This could be on educating people on how to avoid HIV/AIDS, the importance of education, how to fight poverty, how to avoid violence, etc. Performance has also been about raising awareness on human right, particularly women's and children's rights given the fact that the war has made women victims of violence such as rape and given also the rise of child soldiers. Onstage performance as a way of gaining extra money for Congolese comedians is never easy. However, their *mikilistes* fans have been supportive mainly by financing them through *mabanga*.

### ***Mabanga and live performances***

*Mabanga* (plural for *libanga*) or *ko lancer* was used in Congolese music from the 1970s. According to Wa Mukuna, *ko lancer* means that “one has been made known”.<sup>120</sup> *Mabanga* is linked to the idea of someone being “popularized” by his name being mentioned by famous bands in a song or during concerts. Musicians could mention the names of their friends while also taking money from those with whom they had no close relationships but who were willing

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<sup>116</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Emmanuel Iragi, Cape Town, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013.

<sup>119</sup> See Gondola, “Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence and Masculinity Among the Young Bills of Kinshasa.”

<sup>120</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 83.

to pay just to make their names popular.<sup>121</sup> White explains that *mabanga* can be seen as “a way of getting attention, affection, or material support”.<sup>122</sup> In the 1980s, *mabanga* changed to strictly being “a business, an opportunity for the lead musicians to make extra money”.<sup>123</sup> From the late 1990s, *mabanga* have been used by *théâtre* makers as an important form of sponsorship. The names they cite in *théâtres* are both of local and *mikilistes*.

More recently, Congolese actors have been trying to get back to onstage performance as their fans requested. Most of these performances are done overseas and are supported by Congolese of diaspora who make contributions to support their travelling, to book the venue, to cater for them during their stay. What they perform is usually unpredictable and funny. During the performance, they praise their fans by saying their names, the place where they live and sometimes, they add what they do for living (work or business). Most of names in *mabanga* are of Congolese living overseas; their names and the names of the countries or cities where they live are also mentioned. They do it for fame or sometimes, to advertise their businesses.

The major problem seen with the recent onstage performance is the bad quality of the sounds and the distribution of roles. The venues where they perform are also relatively inappropriate. Performance in Europe is usually done in local churches of Congolese, as most appropriate venues are too expensive to hire. The microphones used, the stage, and the way people sit to watch are inappropriate, especially when one watches the performance in the video. The quality of the sound is not only extremely poor but the fact that people laugh a lot and make noise also impacts negatively on the video.<sup>124</sup>

Going to *mikili* is a dream of most Congolese actors as well as musicians. Many young people in Kinshasa join a *groupe théâtral* with the intention to become famous and to find opportunity to go to *mikili*. As a matter of fact, *théâtres* have opened the way to many *Kinois* youngsters to go to *mikili*. Some go and come back while others settle there. Some go to *mikili* on their fans’ invitations while others go there for an arranged marriage, a phenomenon that has lasted for many decades in the postcolonial DRC. In the *dédicace*, actors give their real contacts, mostly their cellphone numbers to all their audience or at least to anyone who will watch the

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<sup>121</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 83.

<sup>122</sup> White, *Rumba Rules*, 170.

<sup>123</sup> Wa Mukuna, “Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo,” 84.

<sup>124</sup> I observed this in one video I watched by a friend with Vue de Loin, Saisai, Mpaka Lowi and others performing in London in a Congolese church as explained by Salima.

*théâtre* and who will wish to contact him/her for any reason. This is more frequent in *théâtres* that are made for *mikilistes* as they are the ones who are believed to be able to send them fancy presents and money. Some actors are also interested in getting married overseas or simply making friendship based on different interests.<sup>125</sup> Gifts from *mikili* also include clothes –mainly brands such as Kasamoto, Versace, Yves Saint Laurent, Gucci, etc. In *théâtre*, actors show the brands on their clothes simply by not removing the brand etiquettes on new clothes, which is a common phenomenon in Kinshasa. With the help of Facebook and other social media, as well as through internet and media circulation such as films and photography, Congolese actors can easily adopt the fashion of the diasporic world. When they interact with their *mikiliste* friends, they order the type of clothes they saw them wearing to look fashionable in the video.<sup>126</sup> Actors also receive other kind of support such as quality makeup, electronic devices such as Ipad, cellphones, cameras, laptop, etc. They also receive film camera, microphones and other equipment for *théâtres* filming, editing and production. All these items are well seen in the films when the proprietor/actor displays them, mostly by mentioning the name of the person who made the donation.

### ***Advertisement***

In *théâtres*, we find advertisements (*pub*) in the beginning, middle or the end. Businesses such as hair and beauty salons, agencies for freight and money transfer, local food shops, marriage and other ceremony décors are advertised for a certain amount of money which serves to sustain the *théâtre* industry in the DRC. Most of these businesses are based overseas but have representation in the DRC. The aim of the advertisement is to make those businesses known among diasporic communities as well as in the DRC. Those who are in the DRC who happen to see the adverts can influence their friends and family members overseas to make use of the businesses, for example by sending them money and other presents. *La Grace* and *Restoration Full Business* (RFB) are among the well-known *Agences* for freight and money transfer that are often advertised in Congolese *Théâtres*. These two *Agences* have representations in many African, European and American countries, and also representation offices in almost all the provinces of the DRC.

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Fanck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

*Théâtres* are sponsored by individuals, fans or businessmen. The governmental support is almost inexistent. In fact, the government only provides funding when using *théâtres* for their propaganda. In 2010, the Nigerian president promised a funding of \$200 million to promote the entertainment industry including Nollywood industry. Although Congolese *théâtres* producers tend to imitate Nigerian films, it is obvious that Congolese authorities are not willing to do the same in terms of thinking of promoting Congolese film industry. At least this kind of sponsorship keeps Congolese *théâtres* away from being the government puppets to a certain extent. That is why *Théâtre* producers enjoy the liberty of choosing the themes that suit them. Most of these themes speak to and about their everyday life.

### **Religion**

Drawing on her research on *théâtres* in Kinshasa, Pype argued that all *théâtres* are religious and that “most of Kinshasa’s teleserials follow the same plotline and feature the same fictional characters”<sup>127</sup>. She regrouped all of them under what she termed “Pentecostal melodrama” as no one in Kinshasa could show her *théâtres* groups that produce “nonreligious *théâtres*”<sup>128</sup>. Pype worked with the Cinarc group as she discovered its high moral standard and the good reputation of its members, who distinguished themselves from actors of other groups through their affiliation to a charismatic church. However, Pype also concedes that in Kinshasa, “not all *théâtre* companies designate themselves as ‘evangelizing groups.’”<sup>129</sup>

The fact that religion is broached or mentioned in most of the *théâtres* does not make them all necessarily religious. Religious phrases such as Bible verses and other things that come up in conversations in *théâtres* with Christian religion tendency have also been noted in Congolese music but this does not make of it a *musique religieuse* as opposed to *musique moderne*, as discussed by White.<sup>130</sup> For instance, *Makolo ya Masiya*, a song by Carlito Lassa, goes “...*Buku ya Nzambe bandeko na tangi ebandeli ti na suka basengi bolingo...*” (the book of God, my brothers, I have read it from the beginning till the end, all they ask for is love). But this song is a well-known rumba that people dance to and it is not a religious song. The fact has been well

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<sup>127</sup> Pype, “The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media, and Gender in Kinshasa” in *Anthropology of the Media*, vol. 6. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 9.

<sup>128</sup> Pype, “The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media, and Gender in Kinshasa,” 10.

<sup>129</sup> Pype, “The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media, and Gender in Kinshasa,” 3.

<sup>130</sup> B. White, *Rumba Rules: The Politics of Dance Music in Mobutu’s Zaire* (United State of America: Duke University Press, 2008) 35.



explored by Wa Mukuna, who wrote that Congolese musicians moved to religious lyrics in their songs during the hard times of Mobutu dictatorship as a form of articulating political metaphors.<sup>131</sup> But this does not mean that their music should be classified as gospel music.

Similarly, Bony Beya argued that religious words and themes in *théâtres* and music do not necessarily make them “religious”.<sup>132</sup> This is clearly seen through the way groups such as Cinarc and Evangélique want to distinguish themselves from the “nonreligious groups”. Therefore, I am arguing, in Pype’s words, that religious groups are those composed by “born-again Christians” and their *théâtres* aim to produce both “material change” and a “significant redress at spiritual level”.<sup>133</sup> But nonreligious groups can include non-Christians or just anyone with acting talent. For members of this group, their acting talents come before their Christian identity. They focus more on social norms (including tradition and religion) than on giving a strictly religious education to people in Kinshasa. Interview with Pastor Joseph made me realise that there is no way all *théâtres* containing some religious talks can just be classified under “Pentecostal melodrama” mostly because religious talks can appear in *théâtres* and music without any straightforward intention to make people repent.<sup>134</sup>

*Théâtres* should therefore be divided into two main groups based on their religious tendencies: those which are religious or linked to charismatic churches and the non-religious ones composed by *acteurs mondains* (“worldly actors” as opposed to religious actors). Therefore, groups *Evangélique* and *CINARC* can be classified religious; Kilimanjaro, Kin Malebo and Attaquants du Rire, among the non-religious ones. Divine intervention features in religious but also in non-religious *théâtres*. But in the latter, one has to be careful in the way religion is brought in: religion or churches might be mentioned although they are not among the main themes; sometimes, a storyline just ends on a moral lesson based on cultural wisdom. According to Bokabela, *théâtres* are inspired by the everyday life in Kinshasa. Everyone acknowledges that the force of evil exists and that prayer is the answer to it. But the forces of good are shown triumphing over the evil in non-religious *théâtres* without explicit mention of Christian religion; for Bokabela this is because in the DRC there are people belonging to other

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<sup>131</sup> See K. Wa Mukuna, “The Evolution of Urban Music in Democratic Republic of Congo during the 2<sup>nd</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Decades (1975-1995) of the Second Republic –Zaire,” *African Music*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1999).

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>133</sup> Pype, “The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media, and Gender in Kinshasa,” 14.

<sup>134</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

religions such as Islam and Buddhism and even atheists. They might be a minority but sometimes *théâtres* have to be religiously neutral by just focusing on “moral values.”<sup>135</sup> Producers understand this better because those who contribute to promote *théâtres* belong to different religions or have different beliefs.

## 1.4 An Overview of Themes

*Théâtres* are mostly inspired by Congolese social and cultural life. Given that most of the *Théâtres* are produced in Kinshasa, the themes are usually drawn from the hardship of life in the capital, although they have touched upon the general crises of the country, especially the instabilities and violence brought about by war. A *théâtre* often contains more than one story, which means that it can deal with various themes. For this reason, I am from time to time referring to one *théâtre* to discuss more than one theme. According to actor and producer Rock Bokabela, the aim of *théâtre* is to expose a problem, develop it, and provide a solution that is acceptable by Congolese norms.<sup>136</sup> However, giving the educational aspect of *théâtres* as vehicle of morality, there have been some shifts in the *théâtres* produced at the turn of the millennium. People have new ways of understanding their lives and new approaches to funding solutions to their everyday problems. *Théâtres* therefore have inspired many in how to survive in Kinshasa based on the well-known proverb “*il n’y a pas de sot métier*” (there is no such thing such as a silly job). Themes that they deal with are based on the everyday hardship of Congolese in the country and in *mikili*.

### ***Poor versus rich: education, unemployment, materialism***

In the DRC, and especially Kinshasa where most *théâtres* are produced, there is a great class gap between the very rich and very poor. These two social classes are always in conflict. A number of *théâtres* deal with the “rich versus poor” theme. This is seen through the way rich people address the poor with disdain. *Théâtres* such as *Bazua Bakelela* and *Mosinzo* are amongst the many which focus on the madness of rich people. To solve this conflict, *théâtres* have

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with Rock Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Rock Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

encouraged people to study more so they can improve their socio-economic conditions. They have also encouraged youngsters to do any legal activity that could bring them income such as joining music and dance clubs, as shown in *Les Mamans d'abord* and *Le Jour le plus long*. In those two *théâtres*, the end is always a happy one as there is a triumph of poor people over rich ones, sometimes by showing how a previously neglected student get a job and becomes respected by those who once took him as less a human and by showing how rich people can lose their wealth and join the poor as it shows in *Bazua Bakelela*.

Unemployment of the educated is widespread in the DRC, and causes another conflict, between the rich uneducated and the poor educated. “*Batanga trop bazanga*” (they have studied too much yet they have nothing) – is a very well-known adage in the DRC. Many people from Kinshasa are familiar with the humiliations that one can be subjected to if he speaks too much French while looking relatively broke. Students who take public transport to Université de Kinshasa (UNIKIN) are usually mocked by taxi drivers as well as the *convoyeurs*<sup>137</sup> in sentences such as “*kaka francais, somba pe yayo motoka na fancais nayo wana*” (“French is all you have, why don’t you use it to buy your own car”).<sup>138</sup> Those who have university degrees would usually reply to rich ones that their money can never buy them degrees. But it does not end there because degrees without proper jobs can also interfere with someone’s love relationship. *La Femme du Patron* shows how one woman’s parents were opposed to her relationship with a man with a University degree but who did not yet find a job. The man was not respected by his girlfriend’s parents, especially the father (Vue de Loin), who often encouraged his daughter to find a better man who has more than just French to offer. The man was usually seen as exploiting the woman, who never hesitated to help him with food and clothes while encouraging him to continue looking for a job. Eventually, the man got a good job at the end and married his woman who has loved him despite all. The main moral lesson of this *théâtre* is to encourage people to earn their living in the most honest way and also that education pays no matter how long it takes for one to get a job. This *théâtre* also shows that marriage based on materialism often fails.

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<sup>137</sup> A common name in DRC for the person who collect money in taxis.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with Boney Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

### ***Occult powers: Fetishes and witchcrafts***

White has discussed how in the Congo witchcraft is seen as a source of success in music and politics.<sup>139</sup> This is the main reason why most parents get worried when their children choose music or celebrity life as career. *La Femme du Patron* shows another family, which is rich but whose wealth originates in the occult. *Fétiche* and occult have been very prominent themes in Congolese *théâtres*. Poverty and envy, mainly for those wanting *vie ya pressée* (“faster/easier ways of getting richer”) have led many to engage in the *voies de ténèbres* (“dark path”). The occult is believed to be practiced by many rich people, ranging from politicians to successful businessmen, as well as other people with successful careers such as prosecutors, doctors, engineers, CEO of companies; musicians and actors are also believed to use witchcraft for success and fame. *Akomi Nzambe* portrays a rich family whose wealth is founded on human sacrifice. The only child of one of the main character (Mathieu Matondo/Sans Soucis) is mentally disturbed. Sans Soucis never wanted pastors to approach his house. He fought with them every time he found them preaching to his wife who thought they could discover the secret of his wealth. At the end, his daughter (Buyibuyi) was delivered from her madness through prayers by one of their domestic workers (Vue de Loin) who was given God’s powers. Sans Soucis then confessed how and why he did it after which he became insane as part of the conditions was that the secret of his wealth was never to be revealed. The main theme here is that it is not worth it to envy rich people especially when their path to riches is unknown. This is a way of responding to rich people, that *théâtres* usually portray as unhappy and with lives full of secrets.

### ***Charismatic churches, pastors and economic struggle***

Through her studies conducted in Ghana on Pentecostal churches and films, Meyer argued that Pentecostal churches have used media to advertise their views en masse and make them popular culture commodities through films.<sup>140</sup> In many *théâtres*, prayers are given the power to solve any difficulties, even the impossible. Pype wrote that in Kinshasa, “Many conversations about Christian leaders revolve around two topics: the miracles they have performed and the quest for

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<sup>139</sup> Whie, *Rumba Rules*, 230.

<sup>140</sup> Meyer, “Praise the Lord,” 105.

the origins of their extraordinary power and success.”<sup>141</sup> This is among the reasons why some *théâtres* warn people against charismatic churches, especially pastors who abuse the trust of their adepts. This is exemplified in *Essobolo*, a *théâtre* about a pastor (Vue de Loin) who smokes marijuana and performs miracles with the *fétiches* given by a *nganga*. The pastor also sleeps with women of his church, married and single and even gays. His church is well-known for welcoming anyone, including prostitutes and even homosexuals, but all for the wrong reasons. The pastor also encourages his adepts to support the church with their tithe and other forms of offerings, but all this he keeps for himself, using it to drink, smoke, pay prostitutes and dress with expensive brands.

In *Soeur en Crise*, a pastor (Mpaka Lowi) and his intercessor (*soeur*<sup>142</sup> Visa) worked together to deceive their adepts. To preach to a rich man, Mpaka Lowi chooses well-known verses of the bible to encourage them to give him more money in the name of the church and to “keep the work of God going”. Mpaka Lowi and Visa engaged in conflict over the number of visits that each paid to one of the richest men, a son of one of their church members, maman Eyenga. At the end, *soeur* Visa left her husband to marry the rich man she was praying for and who offered her a lot materially. *Pasteur Sans Eglise* produced in *mikili* is also about one of those pastors who use and abuse their followers. *Pasteur Pete Pete* tells the story of a pastor sleeping around and impregnating different women.

Charismatic churches which boomed in the DRC at the turn of the millennium have served to reduce the level of wrongdoings but they have also been used as a means of deceiving people especially with the false prophets, immoral and greedy pastors who are the heads of some churches. In fact, good pastors are supposed to be “true defenders of humanity” to distinguish themselves from those who are “demons or witches in the guise of pastors.”<sup>143</sup> . Research conducted in Kinshasa on Charismatic churches also shows that a good pastor is judged through many factors including how good his social life is, how he dresses as many false pastors would care more about dressing too smart with expensive brands, but most importantly, where their

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<sup>141</sup> K. Pype, “Of Fools and False Pastors: Tricksters in Kinshasa’s Television Fiction,” *Visual Anthropology* (2010), 129.

<sup>142</sup> A sister, an adept of a church.

<sup>143</sup> Pype, “Of Fools and False Pastors: Tricksters in Kinshasa’s Television Fiction,” 129.

powers they perform miracles with come from. In fact, there are some witch pastors whose powers to perform miracles are evil.<sup>144</sup>

### ***Prostitution, affairs, sugar-mommies and sugar-daddies***

Prostitution among youngsters, especially students, and competitions in dressing smartly with expensive brands are among the concerns of Congolese *théâtres*. Being a student is part of the high social status in Congolese societies given that not everyone is able to afford education costs. Many relatively poor students, especially women, engage in love affairs with rich, mostly married men so they can compete with rich students. Competition ranges from the way in which they dress to the number of professors they sleep with to pass their subjects. *Sima Ekoli* is one of the many *théâtres* that portrays the flirts between students and their teachers. *Zokisa Ngolo* is about prostitution, in a structured way. It shows a woman pimp who gives shelter to young women who in return have to prostitute themselves and give the biggest amount of what they make to her. She advises them on how to pick rich partners and how to do the “tricks” to their clients to make them pay more.

Affairs are also linked to prostitution or sex with much younger partners; sometimes this is linked to witchcraft as a form of “condition”. *Théâtres* have shown how Congolese women tend to be materialistic by securing a marriage with richer men. After that, they engage in affairs with younger and good looking partners with whom they sleep by paying them — a form of male prostitution. Successful businesswomen have been portrayed as ones of those women who would pay young men with fancy gifts and money to sleep with them as a “condition” to keep up their businesses like it shows in *théâtre Nguangzhou*. Such *théâtres* always end up with one losing her or his marriage, or a confession about the evil condition behind the inappropriate behaviour and the loss of the evil wealth or again someone becoming insane.

Poverty has led to an increase in the sugar-daddy phenomenon in DRC in the post-Mobutu era. Young girls from high schools and universities have men who sometimes happen to be older than their fathers and who are rich enough to take care of some of their needs that their parents cannot provide. In Kinshasa, sugar-daddies are known as *mushina*, someone to run to for financial problems.<sup>145</sup> Often young women engage in different relationships with different men

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<sup>144</sup> Pype, “Of Fools and False Pastors: Tricksters in Kinshasa’s Television Fiction,” 129.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Solange, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.



and refer to them as “ministers” as sometimes one man is not good enough to exercise all the “ministries” or “functions”. For example, a man who gives lift to school would be called “minister of transport”; a handsome young man with whom one goes openly out to party would be called “minister of social affairs”; one who helps to do assignments and other school work is referred to as “minister of education”; a “minister of finance” gives money for shopping and other needs; a “minister of defence” is the one she would call when she is in trouble like a fight or arrest or court cases.<sup>146</sup> All these relationships are based on discretion as there is no need for “scandals” and the men, mostly the relatively old and married ones, respect their discreet partners’ wish to date someone officially as long as the “deal” is respected. Many young students have managed to support their families with these kinds of relationships including paying school fees of their sisters and brothers, open businesses for their parents, mostly mothers who are usually accomplices in what their daughters do.<sup>147</sup> Others have used these kinds of relationships to go to *mikili*, to buy houses, to start successful businesses, to find decent jobs, and even to find husbands.<sup>148</sup> Young men also engage in similar relationships with older women but this is less common. With the level of corruption and with State employment being given based on ethnic group or social status, some young Congolese have forced their ways into the *système*<sup>149</sup> even when they came from an unknown family, relatively poor and which lacks connections.<sup>150</sup> *Vieux Mushina* and *Mosinzo* are ones of the many Congolese *théâtres* produced in the post-Mobutu era that touch upon the above mentioned relationships between older married men and young schoolgirls and students.

### ***Concubinage, children out of marriage and divorces***

In many *théâtres* produced during Mobutu and even in the Post Mobute eras, we see that marriage does not prevent a man from dating other women called *deuxièmes bureaux* (“second

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<sup>146</sup> Bukavu students terminology.

<sup>147</sup> At least most of the man I chatted with on this regard think that mothers always tend to cover their children, especially their daughters for their dirty behaviour.

<sup>148</sup> In some cases, sugar-daddies can influence people such as their relatives, co-workers or their friends ‘sons to marry a young woman they sleep with.

<sup>149</sup> A “*système*” can mean the higher hierarchy or the minorities with “connections”.

<sup>150</sup> “Connections” are usually used by French speaking African of diapora to mean “good opportunities”.

offices”)<sup>151</sup> or mistresses. These mistresses or concubines can have children who were to be supported by their father. A man supports his “outside” children depending on his income and sense of responsibility. Some even buy houses for their mistresses in the name of their children or their mothers, pay school fees, and all the necessary for their children. I have heard stories about materialistic women lying about having children with older and relatively rich men just because they knew the men would do the necessary to take financial care of them. *Théâtres Faux Calcul* (Wrong calculation) is a good illustration of women lying about having children with rich married men. The story is about a young woman who lied to a rich married man about having a son with him. The man (Koffi) married the young woman (Sara) by first abandoning his family, and then he spent a fortune to send the kid (Rock Bokabela) he had with his younger wife to study in *mikili* as her mother requested. He also took care of his new in-laws who moved into his house. The boy was very spoilt and rude to every one when he returned from *mikili*. At the end, the man discovered that he was fooled: the child who made him abandon his first wife and daughters was never his.

*Théâtres* also broach the theme of divorce. Most of the time, the focus is on separations and marriage crises, with a happy ending for the party that endured the most. By divorce I mean the process of signing some papers to end a marriage. Some Congolese men I know usually say that in the DRC believe one does not divorce his first wife but turns her into his concubine. This means that even when a man is separated from his first wife, he still feels he has a certain right of getting involved into her life to stop other men from engaging in serious relationships with her. For this reason, it is easy for a man to move on from one relationship to another while a woman tends to remain stuck as someone’s wife although the man has officially dumped her. Polygamy and *concubinage* do not necessarily put an end to a marriage in Congolese societies. Contemporary *théâtres* have been encouraging Congolese women to stick to the conservative ways of being a good wife which include endurance. Divorce is seen most as Western culture and work of the devil by charismatic churches who pray for families to be protected against *molimo ya divorce* (“evil spirit of divorce”).<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> French for “second offices” because of the way men used to lie that they were still at work or will be working until late while the truth was that they were visiting these other women, their mistresses.

<sup>152</sup> Most of my interviewees who attend charismatic churches in Cape Town told me about the teaching they get to preserve their marriages from the evil spirit of divorce especially in relatively developed countries such as South Africa. On few occasions I also attended “women praying church” in Meltonrose (Cape Town) especially in

### ***Tradition versus civilisation***

*Théâtres* have also shown the clashes between “traditional” and “civilised” ways of life. One theme concerns love and the choice of one’s partner. *Pouvoir* is one such *théâtres*, focussing on the conflict between the claim of parents to decide on their children’s marriage and the modern freedom of choice of spouse. In a village, Bodo (Rock Bokabela) had a woman that his parents chose for him to marry. But when he went to the city (Kinshasa), he fell in love with another woman. It was not easy to convince his father, who was a traditional chief that he was not going to marry the village woman whom he chose for him.

Other clashes between tradition and modernity concern the recourse to healers and *marabouts*. In *La Femme du Patron*, Modero sleeps with another man (Batista) as a condition to keep his wealth. He even made Batista marry a young woman, Meta, whose mother he also sleeps with. At the end, Meta caught her husband (who never had sex with her since they got married because of “conditions” or price to pay to the devil in exchange for what he does for you) sleeping with her long-time secret lover –Modero whom she knew was also her mother’s lover. Modero had no choice but to confess. *Essobolo*’s main character, Vue de Loin, is a Pastor who performs miracles from what he gets from his *marabout*. He even smoke marijuana before he can start the service.

People going back to what many assume to be traditional or “primitive” ways are presented in *théâtres* in a controversial way. My observation is that it is criticised and mostly aims to tell people that it is a sign of being uncivilised. But given that people are so proud of who they are and where they come from in the DRC, it is difficult to detach people from their traditions no matter how civilised they are. Bony Beya said : “we are all proud of our traditions but just that we have different levels of sticking to them...”<sup>153</sup>

### ***Landlords and their tenants, lopango conflicts***

The conflict between tenants and landlords is also one that Congolese societies are well familiar with and which has been depicted in *théâtres*. *Nkolo Lopango* shows how tenants are being harassed by *papa lopango* (the landlord – *lopango*, also called “cour commune”, is a form of

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December 2012, in which the main of meetings themes evolves around how one can keep his marriage safe. Only women attend these meetings (usually on Thursdays morning), with one selected to talk to others about what is needed from the Bible and the women to keep their men from going outside.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

complex with more than two houses where people rent). *Nkolo Lopango* depicts the conflicts over the way tenants are forced to pay water and electricity, sometimes not even being able to see the bills. The landlord can just make up any amount for them to pay just to make their lives miserable. Other arrangements of paying the rent are made, including papa Lopango sleeping with unmarried young female tenants as a form of payment. There was also a man (Modero) sending his own wife (Kalunga) to sleep with Papa Lopango as a way of paying rent. Normally it has to be a secret between them; but in *lopango*, there is almost no secret as everyone watches everyone. The insulting manner in which Papa Lopango addresses his tenants is also very rough in this particular *théâtre*. Some *papa lopango* (male landlords) get to control their tenants' lives and feel like they do have the right of interfering in just about everything of their lives. Rules are made and modified on dally basis. For example, Papa Lopango would complain about one of his tenants, Koffi, dressing in boubous every day; he would complain about him hanging around with unmarried students in the *lopango* while he is a married man, not because he cares about those young women or the moral code regarding fornication, but mostly because he also sleeps with them and with Koffi's wife (Ursile).

When Papa Lopango lives in the *lopango*, it is really very annoying for tenants. "He behaves like a king. If he smells a delicious food from your house, he would send his child with a plate so you can dish for him too".<sup>154</sup> The competitions among the tenants and also the way they gossip about one another is also a well-known fact about people sharing *lopango*. The relationships between tenants are not healthy as they tend to be covetous of one another. They insult each other through songs. For example when Mpaka Lowi saw one of the young men who dated a much older woman, he said to him "Lwambo did not leave any one to declare his songs for him". Just by Mpaka Lowi saying that, the young man understood that Lowi was calling him Mario.<sup>155</sup> The young man quickly replied "*Naza Mario tee, naza jeune marié*" ("I am not a Mario, I am a young married man"). At the same time, another woman (maman Kalunga) who sat in front of her house sang "*kindumba elengi maman, keba na pot yaya*" (prostitution is sweet but careful about the pot). Immediately the woman (Tope) who was sitting with her young boyfriend replied "*bato nyoso batonda na ba cimetières, bakenda, ba suka na pot?*" (did

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with Claude, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>155</sup> A young man who dates or marries a much older rich woman just to be taken care of materially. In fact, any young man who hang around with relatively grown up women is referred to as Mario.

everyone in the cemetery ended up in a pot<sup>156</sup>). Conflicts between tenants and landlords and tenants among themselves, and the means used to “survive” them especially by the tenants can be understood as a form of agency. As the landlord focuses on controlling his tenants’ lives, so the tenants focus on how to control his power on them by using all the necessary means like young students do in *Sima Ekoli*.

### ***Homosexuality***

Homosexuals were introduced in Congolese *théâtres* in the post-Mobutu era; there was no *théâtre* with homosexuals in the 1980s and even in the 1990s.<sup>157</sup> Homosexuality in Congolese *théâtres* is still portrayed as deviant behaviour. Same-sex relationships, especially between men, are seen as “conditions” given to those who practice occult for wealth. In *Essobolo*, Giani was delivered from his homosexuality and the evil spirit which made him feel like a woman was cast away. He became a straight man and got married. But although homosexuality is not encouraged by *théâtres*, they tend to show that homosexuality exists and that societies should at least tolerate it. In *Tobomana*, La Duchess, the character who plays the homosexual man (although he is a straight married man and a father), has good female friends with whom he goes out and who seem to understand him and love him. However, it is difficult for him to engage in relationships except with people (mostly men) involved in witchcraft and who in the occult pact were assigned the condition to be bisexual or homosexual. It is also worth noting that gays are resented in Congolese societies and are associated with bad luck and occult, as many *théâtres* indicate. Lesbians on the other hand are not taken seriously; many men I chatted to on this matter believe that they are just playing but they will stop if they find the right men. They have also been associated with evil “conditions” but for some Congolese, women cannot be strictly homosexual, but only bisexual.<sup>158</sup> Homosexuals – who call themselves *moteur ya sima* (back engine)<sup>159</sup> are well aware that they are not safe in the DRC. The two gays who were interviewed by *Avis du*

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<sup>156</sup> A pot usually refers to a baby’s toilette. According to Bony Beya, people who have HIV usually use pots as they are weak to walk to the toilets.

<sup>157</sup> Interview with Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>158</sup> Most of my male interviewees mentioned this.

<sup>159</sup> Back engine” or “WV” is how gays in the DRC describe themselves to mean the kind of sex men homosexual engage in.

*Publique* disclosed their intention to go to *mikili* where people understand that being homosexual is normal.<sup>160</sup>

### ***Politics and economics***

Almost every *théâtre* produced by Congolese locally or internationally shows the hardship of their lives wherever they find themselves. Locally, *théâtres* seem to be focusing on the socio-cultural and even economic aspects of the everyday in Kinshasa. They expose the problems people in the city face with the electricity on and off, difficulties to pay the bills, especially water and electricity, and even school fees for children. They also speak against the injustice and corruption and the power that wealth gives to the minority over the powerless majority. *Théâtres* have even shown the struggle to afford the most basic needs such as food and healthcare. They show the level of homelessness and insecurity of living in the city. *Théâtres* have also shown the general state of the country like its broken infrastructures and problems related to danger of public transports. But above all, they encourage people to learn how to fight for survival through doing any kind of job no matter how indecent it might seem as long as it is “legal”. At least they focus on showing the origin of all the difficulties that lead to riskier and irresponsible behaviour of Congolese.

*Théâtres* do not explicitly deal with the politics of the country. This silence is caused by prudence: openly speaking against the country’s authorities and the unhappiness that Congolese people endure from their governmental authorities is way too risky. Some comedians have openly spoken about the way the country is run but they have to find a way of hiding the true message by implicating ordinary Congolese people in explaining the failures that the country has been experiencing since the end of Mobutu’s reign. This is well seen in the way Essobe put it in his *Journal*: he said people need to know *nini na bakonzi bazokosala nini na bakonzi bazo kosala te, na nini peuple azokosala na nini peuple azo kosala te* (“what the authorities are doing and what the authorities are not doing, and what people are doing and what people are not doing”).<sup>161</sup> This way, there is less impact compared to just only speaking about authorities and the failures of the leadership of the country. Some *théâtres* titles are based on false promises of

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<sup>160</sup> *Avis du Publique* is a show broadcasted on Kinshasa televisions and which seeks to give answers to the people regarding anything, mostly on what many people would judge scandalous.

<sup>161</sup> *Le Journal Phenomene de Phenomene Esobe*.



the authorities. For example *théâtres Conscience Zéro* and *Mabe Zéro* borrow their titles from *Tolérance Zéro*, a speech that Joseph Kabila made on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 during the 49<sup>th</sup> celebration of DRC's independence.<sup>162</sup> Kabila promised to deal with the corruption and impunities especially of those who think that they are above the law; this turned out to be an empty promise such as the ones he made during the 2006 elections, *Les Cinq Chantiers* and which got him elected.<sup>163</sup> *Théâtre 5 chantiers, 5 mibali, 5 mishina* has its title from “*Les Cinq Chantiers*”. Although the story does not deal with Kabila's discourse of developing the country, especially its infrastructures, the extreme sense of comedy of this *théâtre* shows in a sense how Congolese authorities and their promises are also considered as mere jokes. Sometimes, the title or the story of a *théâtre* has nothing of politics but there is an imitation of an expression used by the authorities such as a well-known phrase that people heard during the war or extremely difficult time such as during the Nyiragongo volcano eruption in Goma in 2002: “*situation eza na maboko*” (the situation is in hand/under control) which is also used by Mpaka Lowi in *théâtre Faux Calculs*.

*Théâtres* produced in the post Mobutu era show progress in Congolese cinema especially in terms of dealing with all the issues of society especially, life in the capital, Kinshasa. Politics and problems related to leadership are not openly played about in *théâtres*. Therefore I conclude that *théâtres* produced in the DRC in the post Mobutu era are comedy of the everyday but with hidden political messages. Themes on *mikilistes* as well as *théâtres* produced in *mikili* are dealt with in the following chapter which focuses on Congolese diasporic identity and *théâtres*.

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<sup>162</sup> “Tolérance zéro en RDC.” <http://tolerancezerordcongo.unblog.fr/> (accessed on 23 September 2013)

<sup>163</sup> “Bientôt la vérité sur les cinq chantiers.” *Jeune Afrique*, 25/05/2009  
(<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/Article/ARTJAJA2524p008-009.xml2/joseph-kabila-reconstruction-bilan-programmebientot-la-verite-sur-les-cinq-chantiers.html>) (accessed on 25 August 2013)

## Chapter 2: *Théâtres* and Congolese Diasporic Identity

Eva and Erick Swyngedouw have argued that “‘Congolese-ness’ as a ‘way of Belonging’ constitutes an important part of the identity of Congolese migrants. Migrants are connected to and involved in their country at the political, economic and socio-cultural levels. They remain committed to their homeland because they feel Congolese, and they feel Congolese because they have lasting relations with Congo. Also it must not be forgotten that ‘Congo’ itself is obviously a pronounced colonial construction and that a ‘national’ unit was created on the basis of very diverse and heterogeneous regional identities.”<sup>164</sup> Morris has also remarked the resiliency Congolese identity among the diaspora of South Africa, arguing that both Congolese and Nigerians living in South Africa are usually recognised by their inability to learn and speak local languages and that because of this, they experience “significant antagonism and prejudice from the local population.”<sup>165</sup>

It has been argued that the study of popular culture is crucial in understanding how national and transnational identities are “constructed and constrained”.<sup>166</sup> This chapter discusses the relationships between Congolese *théâtres* and diasporic identity. It discusses the conditions that led to Congolese migration in South Africa, how Congolese maintain their identity in *mikili* and the politics associated with *théâtres*, both local (produced in the DRC) and *mikiliste* (diasporic). Understanding the role that Congolese *théâtres* play in the lives of Congolese living abroad is very important in understanding how Congolese-ness is maintained in the diaspora and the relationship between home and abroad. *Théâtres* circulation open dialogues between “home” and abroad. The content of these “dialogues” have all been about understanding what is happening at “home” and the reality of *mikili* as opposed to a paradise, a place where everyone is rich. In post Mobutu DRC, families have thought of sending their members overseas as a long term investment. The expectation was and even nowadays still that family members who are in *mikili* would send money and other fancy goods to them. The only problem was that the reality of life

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<sup>164</sup> Swyngedouw, and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 83.

<sup>165</sup> A. Morris, ‘Our fellow Africans make our lives hell’: the lives of Congolese and Nigerians living in Johannesburg’. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 21, no. 6 (Routledge, 1998 ).

<sup>166</sup> White, *Rumba Rules*, 14.

in *mikili* such as the conditions under which people live, the kind of works they do despite their education and other challenges they face in foreign countries including xenophobia and other discrimination, were not clearly known by people in the DRC who only thought of asking for “transfers” (of goods and money).

The chapter is based on literature on Congolese immigrants and interviews with Congolese film and *théâtre* makers of *mikili*.

## 2.1 Congolese Migration: a Background

The late 1990s saw an increase in Congolese emigration; most of these new migrants took refugee status in their host countries not only because the late 1990s marked the beginning of the war in the east, but also because that was the easiest way of obtaining legal documents which would qualify them for jobs and other opportunities. Although Congolese became increasingly part of the transnational communities in the 2000s, research has shown that the history of Congolese migrating in the quest for better life opportunities dates from colonial time. At that time, they were sent by Colonial officials for reasons that included education and working as domestics. For example, in 1910, there were 15 Congolese in Belgium; 28 in 1920; in 1930 they increased to 98. Research conducted in 2006 has shown that 26 909 Congolese live in Belgium. When illegal immigrants and asylum seekers were included, it showed that 80 000 Congolese lived in Belgium in 2006.<sup>167</sup> At the turn of the millennium, going to Europe or North America became challenging while many Congolese were in need of migrating as the situation in DRC was only getting worse because of war in the mineral-rich East of the country and the crises it generated in the entire country including the capital, Kinshasa. South Africa became the easiest and nearest destination for Congolese, as many discovered that there they could get almost the same life opportunities that the Western world offers and a relatively low life cost.<sup>168</sup>

The Congolese who migrated to South Africa followed the same procedure as those who went to European countries such as Belgium, England, and France. The relationship between

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<sup>167</sup> Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 71.

<sup>168</sup> R. Bazenguissa-Ganga and J. MacGaffey, “Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law,” In *African Issues*, edited by De Wall, A. and Ellis, S. (United State and Canada: Indiana University Press, 2000), 48.

Mobutu and P. W. Botha played a role in the first 1980s Congolese migration to South Africa: Zaire was its second trading partner after Zimbabwe. It is also believed that “anti-apartheid trade restriction in South Africa” is one of the main reasons why Zaire became one of the countries South Africa developed a trade interest with in Africa.<sup>169</sup> It is also believed that the first Congolese who immigrated to South Africa during apartheid time were some GECAMINE workers who diverted tracks of cobalt to sell it for “their own account” in South Africa. Most of the Congolese who immigrated to South Africa at that time were educated and needed to fill up some skilled job positions that local black South Africans could not, because of lack of qualification due to racially-segregated education of that time.<sup>170</sup> These skilled labourers included medical doctors and academics to work in hospitals and teach in schools and universities, respectively.<sup>171</sup> The increase of Congolese migration to South Africa can be traced back to the early 1990s. During this time, a civil war that broke in Katanga led to a displacement of over one million people, including many Kasai businessmen; many of these people came to South Africa. Then in the late 1990s another wave of Congolese immigrants joined them, as a consequence of the fall of Mobutu’s reign. Most of these “newcomers” were Mobutuists and other people who were active in Mobutu’s regime and who feared that Laurent Kabila and his allies would not spare them.<sup>172</sup>

Research conducted by the Swyngedouws concluded that Congolese people are “underrepresented in the literature on European urban transnational immigration”.<sup>173</sup> Labour immigrants and refugees are the two categories of immigrants that have been researched on so far and most of Congolese immigrants do not fit in any of them. For the Swyngedouws the Congolese in Brussels should be studied as “atypical” immigrants.<sup>174</sup> The same has been argued about Congolese immigrants of South Africa by Johnny Steinberg, who stated that Congolese immigrants including refugees are not well represented in academic research that found out that “African immigrants to South Africa have become reasonably successful.”<sup>175</sup> This argument is

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<sup>169</sup> Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey, “Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law,” 48.

<sup>170</sup> Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey, “Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law,” 48.

<sup>171</sup> Steinberg, “A Mixed Reception,” 23.

<sup>172</sup> Steinberg, “A Mixed Reception,” 24.

<sup>173</sup> Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 69.

<sup>174</sup> Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 69.

<sup>175</sup> Steinberg, “A Mixed Reception,” iv.

based on the misconception that Congolese's lives have improved in South Africa while the reality is quite the opposite.

The idea of Congolese immigrants being “atypical” can better be understood through the fact that many Congolese leave their country because of personal choices; often by forcing their way in and not because they meet the criterion of the host country's migration policies. It also does not have anything to do with a “special postcolonial arrangements” especially for those who choose Westerns countries and South Africa as their destinations.<sup>176</sup> Only few leave DRC as labour immigrants or refugees. Some Congolese simply leave the country to improve their life, to follow a dream, to get married, to do business or to do jobs that they believe do not require special skills but which they could not find courage to do in their own country (security guards, car guard, babysitting, domestic work, etc).

### ***The Relationship with home***

Research conducted on the Congolese diaspora of Belgium has shown that even Belgian citizenship cannot change certain basic cultural patterns.<sup>177</sup> This is well seen through the way the Congolese dress, eat and celebrate; the language they communicate in with their countrymen and family, their church, etc. Being a Congolese consists of everyday experience but also and mostly of how one maintains his relationship with “home”.

While some Congolese have supported their trips through “personal networks,”<sup>178</sup>, many were rather supported by their family members not only because the last wanted to give their children/ relatives opportunities to a better life but also because they knew very well that they will be able to “share” with them whatever they will earn.<sup>179</sup> Although nowadays, many Congolese have come to understand that *mikili* is not that place where one becomes rich automatically, many others still remember that from the first decade after Congo's independence to the late 1990s, those who were in *mikili* were well respected by their people in the DRC. Having a child or a relative in *mikili* could positively impact on one's social status, by providing

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<sup>176</sup> Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 71.

<sup>177</sup> Swandgodouw and Swyngedouw, “The Congolese diaspora in Brussels,” 71.

<sup>178</sup> J. Owen, “*On se Debrouille*”: Congolese Migrants' Search for Survival and Success in Muizenberg, Cape Town. PhD Thesis, Rhodes University (May 2011), 71.

<sup>179</sup> R. Bazenguissa-Ganga, Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-DRC) and Republic of Congo (Congo) Country Study. A part of the report on Informal Remittance Systems in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, Ref: RO2CS008, (15 January 2005), 7.

more esteem and respect: it was and still is a sign of wealth. *Mikilistes* – people who have been or live in relatively more developed countries – have in mind that they have to keep their families in Congo respected by providing for them from time to time. Money and goods such as fancy presents including clothes, shoes, computers, cellphones, jewellery, just to name a few, are to be sent to relatives in the DRC regularly otherwise the relationship with home is almost inexistent as believed by most of *mikilistes* I know and interviewed on this matter.

People use different ways of sending money “home”. Those who have official documents including refugee statuses, permanent residence of the host country or naturalised citizens, use formal organisations to send money to their countries such as Western Unions or Vest bank/ Money gram. But those who are illegal or possess documents which do not allow them to officially transfer money (example: study permit in South Africa, “*sans papiers*” or illegal immigrants) are obliged to use informal organisations such as agencies and “envelope” (by giving it to people who are visiting DRC, etc.) to send money. Research conducted in 2003 has shown that more than seven million Euros are sent to the two Congos every year by Congolese of diaspora.<sup>180</sup> The money and goods are sent for different purposes such as helping a family member to start a business, school fees, helping family in building or buying a house, contribution to a family member or relative’s marriage, contribution for funerals, paying a hospital bill, bailing someone out of jail, helping someone for his voyage to *mikili*, etc. Every Congolese of the diaspora knows that it is his/ her duty to at least do something for his family once in *mikili*; most of them know that their *mikiliste* reputation is built through what they achieve for their families (and sometimes for themselves) in the DRC. More often, the economic status of the family in DRC does not matter because even when it is relatively rich, and has children overseas that it supports in education and all their needs, family members are still expecting them to send them at least something from *mikili*.

### ***Political activism in the diaspora***

The 2006 and 2011 elections in the DRC made international headlines as the Congolese diaspora showed their concern on the matter. Congolese diaspora spoke against human right violations such as rape of women, killings, child soldiers, and the seemingly globally organised resource looting in their country since the beginning of war in the late 1990s. Especially in 2011, protests

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<sup>180</sup> Bazenguissa-Ganga, Democratic Republic of Congo (Congo-DRC) and Republic of Congo (Congo), 19.



were organised in United Kingdom, USA, France, Belgium, South Africa, etc. by Congolese diaspora who wanted to make their concerns heard worldwide.<sup>181</sup>

An article by Niren Tolsi in *Mail and Guardian* discusses these protests in South Africa. Tolsi wrote about the arrest of 150 Congolese protesters in front of Luthuli House, who believed that South African government has supported Kabila's fraudulent gain of the 2011 elections. As one of the voice of the Congolese diaspora, Nzongola-Ntalaja, the author of *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, explained that South Africa's interference in Congolese affairs is what led the Congolese diaspora of South Africa to protest against South African politicians.<sup>182</sup> An article in *West Cape* also speaks about the protest of about 500 Congolese in the Cape Town CBD who were dispersed by 40 South African policemen.<sup>183</sup> *The Voice of America* reported the protests of Congolese diaspora almost all over the world especially in the United States. The diaspora had spoken loudly against the violation of human rights in the DRC and those they believe to have something to do with it, especially the intimidating killings during 2011 elections and the massacre that continues in the "mineral-rich east". They have shown their concerns about the international community not acknowledging the killings that have been carried in the DRC should be considered genocide.<sup>184</sup>

Most of Congolese of diaspora are *combatants* (in the sense of fighters or warriors). The latter are characterised by a strong hostility toward Joseph Kabila's government. *Combatant* movement became very active during 2011 elections as they mostly supported the opposition leader, Etienne Tshisekedi. They played a capital role during the election campaign by doing all they could to make their families in the DRC vote for the man they believed could bring the change to the country. *Combatants* are very hostile toward any person they believe to be Joseph Kabila's supporter in diaspora. During 2011 elections, many Congolese were physically attacked by *Combatants* if they showed support for Kabila or any other candidate who was not Tshisekedi. Most of those who were reported by the media as protesting against the treachery

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<sup>181</sup> <http://www.polity.org.za/article/sa-statement-by-thethe-congolese-diaspora-on-current-situation-in-the-drc-23112012-2012-11-23> (28 June 2013).

<sup>182</sup> Tolsi, "DRC election protest goes viral," *Mail and Guardian* (03 Feb 2012).

<sup>183</sup> Luhanga, "[DRC refugees clash with cops as election violence spills over in Cape Town](#)," *West Cape* (07 December 2011).

<sup>184</sup> Colombant, "Congo's Diaspora Struggles to Bring Change From Outside," *Voice of America* (Last updated on: March 08, 2012).

during the 2011 elections were the *Combatants*. It is obvious that Congolese diaspora is politically divided between *Combatants* and Kabila supporters (or Kabilistes). *Combatants* nowadays also include some extremists who simply do not support the current government, they are not necessarily Tshisekedi's supporters as it was believed during the 2011 elections.<sup>185</sup> But despite all these little conflicts, Congolese diaspora comes together as one in wishing for the end of war and the globally organised pillage of their country's resources that has been carried out by foreigners in collaboration with Congolese authorities.

Most Congolese live in their host countries under refugee status or as illegal immigrants (*sans papiers*). The original causes of migrating may differ but once in the host countries, they become united through the hardship of diasporic life that the majority of them encounter. At least most of those I have interviewed in Cape Town agree that if the situation was better in the DRC, they could have never have felt obliged to subjugate themselves to the kind of life they face in *mikili*. The blame is put on what they believe has to do with the general dysfunction of the country which is caused by the lack of patriotic leadership. Although there are some unrest political debates that Swahili and Lingali-Congolese speaking engage in while talking about the actual politic of the country as I discuss later, the diaspora shares what they believe to be the "curse" of being a Congolese. This is mostly experienced during the application for documentation to stay legally in the country. Congolese have complained more than once regarding the way they get treated by South African Home Affairs. It is a common thing to go and stand in a queue at Home Affairs at six in the morning, wait the whole day and to be sent home at four in the evening without being received for a simple document renewal. In Johannesburg, every Congolese knows what *kitunga*<sup>186</sup> means and what it means to be put in it for being a *sans papiers*. There are always policemen waiting to arrest people without papers at Home Affairs especially in Johannesburg: "they would pretend to be there to maintain order like to make sure everybody is on the queue but the real reason for their presence is to wait and arrest those who were not helped."<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> See for example the numerous videos on you tube by Boketchu Wayambu and how he speaks on behalf of the Combatants. He often mentions "recour a l'authenticite", a Mobutuist ideology of the early 1970s and his politic of nationalism.

<sup>186</sup> *Kitunga* is a Lingala word for a basket. For Congolese of South Africa, it refers to a police van/ car used to carry criminals.

<sup>187</sup> Interview with Doudou, Johannesburg, the 28 May 2013.

The kind of A4 paper that is given as refugee status or asylum seekers document in South Africa is also another problematic sort of identification. It is always a problem when one shows it at his new work place as his identification document. During her research on Congolese survival in Muizenberg (Cape Town), J. Owen wrote about *ngunda* (refugee documents) as sometimes not respected and/or recognised by some South African institutions. Because of this, many Congolese with *ngunda* are denied their right to study and to work although it is well written on their papers.<sup>188</sup> It is therefore not surprising that in 2009, only those with refugee ID (the red ID) could open a bank account or send money through Western Union (of course by also providing their proofs of addresses and their payslips or work contracts). Taking goods on credit is also a problem with some refugee identification documents. Congolese in Cape Town always acknowledge that “*ngunda eza na respect te*” (*ngunda*<sup>189</sup> is not respectful). This is why they engage in forming groups and organisations to meet and discuss not only their lives in *mikili* in a sense of mutual support but also to discuss the politics of the country and what they believe would help improve its state.

### ***Churches and prayers***

The common idea that only God can save Congo from its tribulations went transnational in the post Mobutu era. In the previous chapter, I discussed wa Mukuna’s argument regarding how Congolese popular musicians composed songs with Gospel like message during the hard time of Mobutuism in the late 1980s. As Congolese move around the globe, they carry their beliefs and practices with them.

Pype has argued that charismatic churches boomed in Kinshasa in post Mobutu. She explains that in Kinshasa, “everyday reality” including illness, economic struggles, political instabilities, is interpreted through the belief in charismatic churches philosophy.<sup>190</sup> In these churches, people go to pray for all their problems and projects. According to one charismatic church pastor in Cape Town, praying for one to find a way to go to *mikili* is among the most important subjects of the prayer in Kinshasa churches. People quickly become very engaged in church activities, organise “retreats” and *chaines de prieres* (a series of prayer, taking from three

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<sup>188</sup> Owen, “*On se Debrouille*,” 74.

<sup>189</sup> *Ngunda* is the A4 paper given in South Africa as refugee status or asylum seekers’ permit.

<sup>190</sup> K. Pype, “Media Celebrity, Charisma and Morality in Post-Mobutu Kinshasa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 35, Number 3 (September 2009), 543.

to fourteen days non-stop) when looking for *nzela ya poto* (“a way to overseas”).<sup>191</sup> They pray for the passport application to not delay, and then the second and most difficult stage is to pray for the visa for those who can afford to travel legally. Intense prayers, special intercessions by church pastors and prophets, and some honourable church members are to be done no matter the way the person chose to do his voyage. Those who need visa would pray for less complication to get one and sometimes, for finding all the necessary means to pay for all that is asked by the immigration officials.

Once the person reaches his destination, the first thing is to find a church where other Congolese pray. This is more common among those Congolese from DRC who were involved in charismatic churches. The language matters because for those who come to South Africa, for example, English and local languages such as Zulu (for those in Durban and Johannesburg) or Xhosa (for those in Cape Town) are the ones spoken in local South African churches. In Congolese churches, French, English and sometimes Swahili are the languages of the cult. Newcomers would go to Congolese churches to thank God for their successful *voyage*. Later with time, they would need prayers to ask God to help them cope with the hard life, to give them strength and courage. Strength to work hard for survival and courage to do any kind of work that presents itself in the host country.<sup>192</sup>

Congolese church members in *mikili* support one another through prayers, visits, and other church social meetings. They also pray for those who do not have jobs to get one and for the “spiritual battles” that families face in the host countries including divorces, children being addicted to drugs and alcohol, rape and other crimes especially for those who live in unsafe places such as South African townships where the majority of crimes are committed including the high rate of xenophobic attacks as experienced in April and May 2008.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>193</sup> See M. Neocosmos, *From “Foreign Natives” to “Native Foreigners”*: Explaining Xenophobia in Post-apartheid South Africa: Citizenship and Nationalism, Identity and politics (Senegal: CODESRIA, 2010).

## 2.2 Home and Abroad in DRC-produced *théâtres*

All *théâtres* produced in the DRC aim to reach the diaspora because it constitutes their major source of sponsorship, as discussed in the previous chapter. DRC *théâtres* productions have two aims in relationship to the diaspora. First, they aim to update the diaspora on what is going on in the country especially at socio-cultural and economical levels. Second, *théâtres* produced for diaspora also aim to express an image of *mikilistes* and their lives. Mostly the themes for and on *mikilistes* are very stereotyped because of the continual conflicts between the local and the diaspora, especially regarding the question of who is better than who in terms of living. While the diaspora has been accused of considering the local as inferior and less civilised, the locals sees the diaspora as irresponsible and full of bragging. This conflict is almost the same as the one that rural and urban people in Congo engage in. *Théâtres* produced in DRC deal with these conflicts in various ways; mostly, they emphasise the bad manners of *mikilistes*.

The conflicts between the local and the diaspora which have been represented in *théâtres* have not stopped *théâtre* actors from pursuing their dream of joining the diaspora. The majority of actors – if not all of them – dream about going to *mikili*. *Mabanga* have served as means of finding contacts and creating friendship with *mikilistes* with the hope that they will invite them to *mikili* by any means. Some even believe that the lack of decency of Congolese actors, mainly actresses, especially in *théâtres* they make for *mikiliste* audience, is one of the means used to attract *mikilistes*' attention. The *look de stars*<sup>194</sup> – which includes women showing off exaggerated cleavage, wearing short or tight dresses to show off the legs and the complexion and the shape of the body, dressing extravagantly as a way of demonstrating expertise in *la sape* ect. – works toward the ambition to emigrate to *mikili*. Also the way makeup is worn, how one describes him-/ herself in the *théâtres*, providing the real cellphone number, etc., all are meant to get *mikilistes*' attention with the intention of getting involved with one who would help in organizing the voyage to *mikili*.<sup>195</sup> *Théâtres* in which people largely expose their body are often banned from DRC as they are judged immoral and can be of bad influence to children and teenagers. The ministry of culture gets to decide what is best for Congolese society in terms of

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<sup>194</sup> Interview with Bakari Matondo, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

audio-visualities. Congolese music industry is also often subjected to this process especially with regard to song lyrics and the dance in the clip. But those in *mikili* seem to enjoy even the most scandalous parts of Congolese *théâtres*.<sup>196</sup>

### ***Representing home for the diaspora***

Many *théâtres* targeting diasporic audience show the general ambiance of Kinshasa; the new ways of making money; and popular culture in the city, such as dance, music and fashion. They also tend to update *mikilistes* with the new jargon in the sense of “how it is called these days” and what is termed *Lingala facile* (“easy Lingala”). *Théâtres* also deal with fashion such as showing *mikilistes* how *Kinois sapeurs* are dressing up and new *pagnes* (“cloth”). But above all, the struggle for survival is always emphasised in *théâtres* for *mikilistes*, with the aim of reminding them about the degrading state of the country at all levels. For example in *Journal Phenomene de Phenomene Essobe*, Essobe, the Congolese comedian who is the well-known specialist in deforming French words, says:

*Bato ya mboka oyo bazali na ba mboka nyonso parci par la patate patate... bokendaka pe botalaka na sima. Yango tee ezali soki okeyi, ozokofanda na poto, kuna okeyi kokuta mbala, okeyi kukuta ba mayonem, okeyi kokuta oo soki nini yango... oo oliaka mosuni banda tongo ndenge bobetelaka biso kaka na masolo ooo '...awa vraiment maki eeee... 'ata oke kokut'ango, il faut bokanisaka pe ba oyo botika na sima mokolo mosusu bakokufa parceque nga nasi namona moto kaka na Afrique awa akoma naye squelette, alingi naye kozala na musuni te, alobi naye 'tika nazala bongo po bomonaka que pasi ezali... 'Nasengi une minute de silence tokanisa pays ndenge ekufi...ata bo changea ba nationalite, bokoma soki ba nani, botingama na poto, bolingi koya te, yango nasengaki une minute de silence po to yeba kokanisa pays...*<sup>197</sup>

People from this country who are in other countries here and there... go but look back. It is not like if you go, you stay in *poto*,<sup>198</sup> you get there and find potatoes, mayonnaise, you

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<sup>196</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>197</sup> *Le Journal Phenomene de Phenomene Esobe*, part. 1

<sup>198</sup> Another word for *mikili* (overseas).



find I don't know what... that you eat meat from morning as you always tell us stories that '...really here eggs!' even if you find them (eggs), you must think of those you left behind because one day they will die because I have seen a person here in Africa who has become a skeleton, he has refused to have a flesh (on his bones), he said 'let me be like this so they can see that there is hardship.' I am asking one minute of silence so we can think of how the country has died. Even if you have changed the nationality and have become I don't know whom, you are stuck in *poto*, you do not want to come back...this is why I have asked one minute of silence so that we can figure out how to think of the country.

The above is just one of the many quotes that can be found in *théâtres*, which, no matter their themes seek to reach the diaspora as a means of touching their consciousness regarding the state of the country. *Théâtres* call for *mikilistes* not to forget the country no matter the nationality they take. "Forgetting" or "remembering" as implied by Essobe has nothing to do with coming back to DRC or a simple act of memory but has rather material connotations. "Remembering" the country means remembering people who were left in the DRC such as family members and friends. He does not mean *mikilistes* have to return to see them but send them money for food if indeed they do eat "meats and eggs" every day in *mikili*.

While the DRC is a place associated with extreme difficulties, it is still a home for Congolese, like Essobe complained to God in his prayer: "*...ba mosusu bakomi kotika Congo, bazo kende kovandaka na poto, bakomi komona lokola poto mboka na bango nzoka mboka oyo yo opesa biso yango oyo...*"<sup>199</sup> ("...others are now leaving Congo, they are going to stay in *poto*, they now see *poto* as their own country while this is the country that you gave to us..."). This is a way of reminding Congolese diaspora that they should remember where they come from. Perhaps, "there is no place like home" as Patrick Bashizi (the Swahili filmmaker who lives in Scandinavia) put it during our conversation on skype, when he told me about his plan of investing in Bukavu (DRC), his home town. But in Essobe's statement there is also a political message. It is the question Bony Beya asked me to think about : "The Congo is envied by Whites and also other Africans such as its neighbouring countries. Essobe meant we should not let anyone take from us what God gladly gave us...you see, everyone has his place, like every

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<sup>199</sup> *Journal Phenomene de Phenomene Essobe*, part. 1

people and his country. So, nothing or no one should ever make us leave our beautiful country...”<sup>200</sup>

### ***Representations of mikilistes***

*Mikili* and *mikilistes* as themes of Congolese *théâtres* have emerged in the post Mobutu era, mostly with critical accents. Some *théâtres* focus on the bad influence that *mikilistes* have on Congolese youth. Many Congolese youngsters have a bad conception of what it means to be a *mikiliste* because of the influence of irresponsible *mikilistes* and how they portray *mikilisme*. What Congolese youngsters think of *mikilistes* is *sape*, inappropriate language, talking about the wonders of *mikili*, excessive parties and drunkenness, and other irresponsible behaviour.<sup>201</sup> *Mikilistes* also have a bad reputation of conning those who trust them or by leaving women they slept with during their visit home pregnant or infected with HIV/AIDS after promising them marriage and taking them to *mikili*.<sup>202</sup> What locals dislike about *mikilistes* is generally the vainness that most of them tend to be characterised by and looking at those in the country as inferior, poor, ignorant and less civilised.<sup>203</sup> For example in *Muzungu le Belgicain*, we see how Vue de Loin behaved when he arrives from Belgium. One of the most remarkable things he does is spraying a kind of disinfectant on his hands every time some one shakes his hands. In fact, he gets angry when people touched him. Even his own children. He also sprayed things in the air to “clean” it. His favourite word was *putain* (the french f-word). The way he dresses is also very extravagant, an extreme *sapeur*. In *théâtre Chocolat Partout*, *mikilistes* behave in the ways that *Kinois* are familiar to about them, including *la sape*, partying, sleeping around and recording sex noise to be shown to other *mikiliste* friends. They also enjoyed being praised, and deceiving people by promising them marriage, mostly rich people’s children, and telling them how *mikili* is a paradise.

Through their *théâtres* on *mikilistes*, *Kinois* have also express their understanding that going to *mikili* does not mean becoming rich automatically. *Théâtres* such as *Muzungu le Belgicain*, *Mouscovitch*, *Le Parisien refoulé* just to name a few, *Kinois* aim to show that being a

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013, and online interview with Rock Bokabela, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

<sup>202</sup> For example in *Chocolat Partout*.

<sup>203</sup> Interview with Bakari Matondo, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

*milikiste* does not mean the end of financial struggles. These *théâtres* also expose the fact that people can get disappointed by financially relying too much on a *mikiliste* relative, and that one does not always return from *mikili* with money or other forms of wealth to distribute.

In *Mouscovitch*, a guy who spent over a decade in Moscow came back only with a suitcase full of books. People who expected money, clothes, shoes, jewellery, etc were shocked when he gave them books as presents from *mikili*. He had to explain to them that he had come back only with books and his degrees from Moscow. He was seen as an embarrassment for his family. People mocked him and even insulted him and that is how he was given the nickname of Mouscovitch to make it sound like a Russian name. Mouscovitch started looking for a job in Kinshasa but it took too long before he could get one because he did not have “connections”<sup>204</sup>. As he studied agriculture in Moscow, he started applying his techniques to produce vegetables in his father’s property as a mean of educating people on how to grow healthy plants. Later, as he got a decent job as an engineer of agriculture, his pride was restored and only then his family became pride of him by glorifying him about the years spent in *mikili* studying. *Mouscovitch* tells a story about what locals think of *mikilistes* and how they are mocked when they do not meet Congolese’s expectations of *mikilistes* but also how they are praised and envied not only when they succeed but also for their having seen *mikili*. Above all, *Mouscovitch* is a depiction of a certain understanding that not all *mikilistes* are *sapeurs*, womanisers, liars or warring too much about giving a “*mikiliste*” impression to locals.

*Lifelo ya Mundele* (“hell of a white man”) portrays the competition among *mikiliste* families in DRC and how money they send to their families in the DRC can create divisions among them. A couple living in *mikili* was lying to each other, so that each one was sending money to their family without informing the other. The in-laws (the woman’s and man’s families) in Kinshasa lived in competition, in the sense of whose child is doing more for his/ her family. If the woman’s relatives visited the man’s and found that they have new goods such as cars, clothes, or apartment, they would phone their daughter and ask to do the same by explaining and even emphasising the fact that her husband’s family is receiving a lot from their son. *Vue de Loin* (the *mikiliste* woman’s father) would walk in the city inspecting or spying on what *mikilistes* have been doing for their families and themselves like building fancy houses,

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<sup>204</sup> Here, the term “connection” means someone to connect you to those capable of providing jobs.

furnishing their parents' houses, sending fancy clothes, buying them cars to be used as public transport, etc. He even asked one of his friends, Soundiata, what he does to make his son send him money regularly. Soundiata explained by also emphasising that “*nga na lalaka na code, na lamukaka na code*” (“I sleep with a code<sup>205</sup>, I woke up with a code”). This hurt Vue de Loin who then asked Soundiata to tell him their secrets so he could also get his daughter to send him money or do something for them like other *mikilistes* do for their families; he wanted to know if there was a need to see a *nganga* (healer, witchdoctor) for that but Soundiata and his wife assured him that they do not do such a thing.

*Théâtres* on *mikilistes* are ripe with ambivalence. Through their depiction of *mikili* and *mikilistes*, one sees how they are envied and mocked at the same time. To those in the DRC, they simultaneously create attraction and repulsion. In brief, they seem to testify a level of understanding that *mikilisme* as an identity is a positive thing but it has its own challenges in *mikili* and in DRC.

### 2.3 The Diaspora Films Back



*Théâtres* produced by the Congolese diaspora are influenced by and a response to *théâtres* on *mikilistes* produced in the DRC. *Théâtres* which have been produced by Congolese diaspora have focussed on various themes as discussed in chapter 1: witchcraft, homosexuality, materialistic relationships, charismatic churches, just to name a few.<sup>206</sup> Some, however, have reclaimed the image of glamour associated with *mikili*.

*Msanzi Fo Sho*, made in Cape Town tells a story of a young woman who after she arrives in Cape Town, her relatives abandoned her by switching off their telephones. She was “helped” by some Congolese who took her to a certain woman (also from Congo) who was to “provide” shelter for her until she gets on her feet or find people she was looking for. The woman who gave her a shelter had been in South Africa for much longer. She was the manager of the house, in the sense that the contract of rental was under her name. She then transformed the house into a

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<sup>205</sup> “Code” is the number, a sort of password that one has to give to the *agence* when collecting money or other thing that has been sent.

<sup>206</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

“business” by making the bedrooms available for rental on a price that arranged her in the sense that what she got from her “tenants” was enough to pay to her landlord without her spending a cent.

The young women who lived in the house were unemployed and so to pay their rents and contributions for food and electricity, they were forced to become prostitutes by the “mother of the house”. Every day, she asked each of them to report to her how many “customers” were met and how much money was made. In fact, she made them “work” for her. In the house there was also a young Congolese man who worked as a security guard. Every morning when he came back from work, he had a problem with the mother of the house who often shouted at him for leaving his smelly work shoes in the house. Thus the young man was forced to marry a much older Congolese woman to help him survive and solve his “paper problem”. The *théâtre* focuses more on the hardship of life abroad and on how the “humanity” – in the sense of being there and caring for each other in difficult time -is almost not practiced in *mikili* as the producer of *Masanzi fo Sho* explained.<sup>207</sup>

Charismatic churches exist in *mikili*; just like in Kinshasa, one does not need a “special” place to have a church. In Kinshasa, there are buildings that are households at night and churches during the day. In *mikili*, many Congolese also transform their apartments into churches. In the post-Mobutu era, charismatic churches have served as a way of bringing Congolese together in what is known as a “spiritual battle” (*etumba ya molomo*), to pray for the country while experiencing healing, deliverance and prophecies that promise better life if the requirements are met.<sup>208</sup> But some Congolese have come to realise that charismatic churches and their pastors are sometimes corrupted and driven by materialism. The struggle to get jobs and to cope with the cost of life in *mikili* have driven the Congolese diaspora to engage in illegal activities such as one transforming himself into a man of God, pastor or prophet, so as to manipulate the adepts. This is seen in *Pasteurs sans Eglises* (“Pastors without churches”), which depicts *mikilistes* who refer to themselves as born-again Christians and who have transformed their apartment into a church. The church is however a scheme: the fake pastors seduce beautiful rich and married women, by promising them to deliver them from the evil spirit that their husbands have brought to them by

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<sup>207</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

sleeping with other women outside the marriage. This is actually not true, but the point is to keep those women in their houses for as many days as they can, away from their children and husbands. This particular *théâtre* aims to show the local that the churches also exist in *mikili* and that some of them are also corrupted, a fact also well known about some charismatic churches in the DRC. Therefore, it shows not only that Congolese carry their belief and practices with them but also the corrupted means people engage in to survive or simply to deceive others in *mikili*.

In the DRC people tend to think that all *mikilistes* have the same life. Many cannot stand the pressure that their families put on them in the name of what other *mikilistes* have been doing for their families. This includes helping their family member to immigrate to *mikili*, paying their school fees, building flats, opening companies, etc.<sup>209</sup> People in the DRC care less to know how their relatives get the money they send to them. Also, before they engage in competitions of caring for the people in the DRC, *mikilistes* tend to neglect the fact that their host countries and the type of identification papers and skills are the main explanation to why some are able to help their families while others are just stuck and only have the name “*mikiliste*” to rejoice in.<sup>210</sup> Some *mikilistes* involved in *théâtres* feel that people in the DRC, mostly their relatives, should know the kind of jobs most of them do and how difficult it is to achieve something for them, since what they earn is barely enough to survive within the countries where they live.

Profil de Montreal and his *théâtre* group *Les Amis de Profil* in Montreal are working on *Epitazzore*, a *théâtre* that explains to the Congolese in the DRC and other diaspora what life is really about in *mikili*, specifically in Canada.<sup>211</sup> According to Profil de Montreal, his *théâtres* are inspired by the everyday life of the Congolese in Canada and portray what distinguishes them from *mikilistes* of other countries such as France, South Africa, England, Belgium, etc.<sup>212</sup> Each country has its policy on how to treat foreigners especially refugees. If Congolese living in Montreal can do more for their families in the DRC this is mostly because of the various social

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<sup>209</sup> Interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>210</sup> Interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>211</sup> Profil de Montreal is a Congolese producer and actor of *Théâtres* in Montreal. He is also the founder of Congomikili in Canada. He has not given me his real names as he thought that it did not really matter. He said that that is how he is known by *mikiliste* and everyone else. In 2011, he produced *Infidelite*. He is currently working on *Epitazzore* which he thinks should be released before the end of this year.

<sup>212</sup> Interview with Le Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.



grants they get from the Canadian government – those living in France or Belgium do not get the same favours.

Other *théâtres* produced in *mikili* also aim to encourage the Congolese diaspora to be honest in the way they speak about themselves to their families in the DRC. The reason why people in the DRC expect a lot from their relatives in *mikili* are “the lies and illusions” that characterise most *mikilistes'* lives<sup>213</sup> – what Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey refer to as “constructing images of self”<sup>214</sup>. Congolese send home photos taken in front of beautiful buildings on which they are very well dressed or eating fancy food.<sup>215</sup> Photos and other social networks such as Facebook are used to romanticise life in *mikili*. For example, it is rare to see Congolese women who make hair in Bellville or in other Cape Town free markets taking photos during their work to be sent home or posted on Facebook. Few of those who work in fancy saloons can do so because it is “less shameful” than braiding hair in an open stand.<sup>216</sup> They would rather send one that does not portray them as stand-up hairdressers. It is also almost rare to see a man sending to DRC his photos in security uniforms. The photos posted on Facebook are very carefully selected to give an impression that everything is almost perfect.<sup>217</sup> Photos are also taken in fast food restaurants such as MacDonald, Hungry Lion, Nandos, KFC, just to name a few from Cape Town, to impress those in the DRC with the main aim being to tell them that in *mikili*, people do not starve. On phones, the story regarding *mikili* foods is told, like one Congolese in Cape Town overheard another one talking to his relatives in the DRC on a public phone: “*awa nalyaka soso mobimba ngai moko*” (“here I eat a whole chicken alone”).<sup>218</sup> For those who see themselves as “responsible” and “honest” *mikilistes*, calling DRC just to talk about food, clothes, buildings, perfumes, just to name a few, does not worth it as it only creates illusions such as *mikili* being a paradise for the Congolese.<sup>219</sup> Stories regarding how hard one needs to work to get that “chicken to eat all alone” are often not told. However, some *théâtres* have exposed how hard it is to make a living in *mikili*. In *Lifelo ya Mundele*, we see Congolese

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<sup>213</sup> Interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>214</sup> Bazenguissa-Ganga and MacGaffey, “Congo-Paris,” 66.

<sup>215</sup> Interview with Sandrine, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>216</sup> Interview with Helene, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>217</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>218</sup> Interview with Claude, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

men working in construction sites and how they are complaining in their conversation about the suffering in *mikili*. The same *théâtre* also shows a married Congolese woman, one of the worker's wife who engage in prostitution while her husband is at work to get extra money to send to her family in Kinshasa.

*Mikilistes* are sometimes referred to as “the divorced ones” by those in the country.<sup>220</sup> Women especially, are known for not taking their marriages seriously and for blindly imitating the “western culture” of divorce.<sup>221</sup> *Pitopale*, a recent *théâtre* made by the group JTM of Congolese diaspora of Montreal, shows the causes of divorces among *mikilistes* and why children in *mikili* are disrespectful. *Pitopale* also tells us that not every woman who divorces is after her husband's money or wants to be the only one to benefit from social grants provided by the government to their children. It also shows that the blame for divorce should not be put on women only as in some cases: it is the man's behaviour that changes his wife's. For those in Canada, women are the ones who benefit from the divorce because the social grants are mostly given to women. Because of this, the in-laws in DRC often engage in arguments over who ruined whose life. The man's family tends to fight the family of their son's ex-wife for taking everything away from their son who is their source of income.<sup>222</sup>

*Mikiliste* children whose fathers do not have jobs or successful career tend to love and respect their mothers the most as they seem to be the ones to be providing for the families but mostly with the social grant they receive from the government of their host countries. In *Pitopale*, *maman Kapi* tries to put some sense in his son's head while he asked her 300 Canadian dollars to buy a leather jacket. The mother was shocked to hear the price of the cloth the child requested. So, she said to him: “...*bandeko nanga ya Kinshasa bazo benga ngai baliye te deux jours...*” (“...my relatives in Kinshasa are calling me that they have not eaten for two days...”). But the woman decided to buy her son what he wanted anyway. The fact that she mentioned how that amount could help her family in Kinshasa shows that she does care but she chose to do what her son wanted to make him feel good as a *mikiliste* child. This *théâtre* also shows that children in *mikili* tend to imitate the behaviour of the host country's children. Some *mikiliste* parents try

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<sup>220</sup> See video *Makambo Eyebani vol. 5: Bana Mikili contre Bana Kin*

<sup>221</sup> *Makambo Eyebani vol. 5: Bana Mikili contre Bana Kin*

<sup>222</sup> Especially given the fact that most *mikilistes* family members in the DRC do not want to work as they have already someone to take care of them financially. Interview with Profil de Montreal.

to remind their kids that they are *Africains* as one of the woman in this *théâtre* (Annie Makwangala) was trying to convince her daughter to behave respectfully to her boyfriend (a married man) as he was the one providing for them. She even reminds her that they are Africans and that for them: “*mobali ya maman babengaka ye papa*” (“your mother’s man you call him papa”).

Some *mikiliste* videos, however, claim the glamour traditionally associated to *mikili*. The video *Makambo Eyebani vol. 5: Bana Mikili contre Bana Kin* (the matter is disclosed: people of *mikili* against people of Kinshasa) stages a *polémique* (polemic) between the Congolese diaspora of Holland and the *Kinois*. *Kinois* and *mikilistes*, mostly women, compete for who is the cleanest, the most elegant, who knows *la sape* best, who is the most respectful, and who is the richest. This contest was sparked by a comment that Visa, the late *théâtre* actress, allegedly said and that is not mentioned in the video – namely, that *Kinois* are better than *mikiliste* women. In the video, *mikiliste* women defend their clothes as not being cheap, saying that they only wear original branded clothes unlike those in Kinshasa, who wear fake brands from China; they show the perfumes they wear, their jewellers, their smart phones, their expertise in wearing makeup, etc. One woman from *mikili* in this video talks about the *Kinois* being broke, especially *théâtres* actors who only exist because of *mabanga* sponsored by them (*mikilistes*). One *mikiliste* woman thus addresses all people involved in *théâtres*: “*basi ya poto nde bazo sala ozala...awa tosalaka maboke te, tosalaka mosala... yo il faut obwaka ngai po nafutela yo ndako...*”<sup>223</sup> (“*mikiliste* women are the ones who make you. Unlike you there, here we do not do *maboke* (another word for *théâtres*) for living: we work. You, you must say my name in *mabanga* so I can pay your rent.”). Here *mikilistes* consider themselves as being far better than those in Kinshasa, especially their financial independence from people in the DRC. The woman who spoke back for the *Kinois* said that everything people enjoy in *mikili* can also be found in Kinshasa unless one is unable to afford it. She explains about the brands she was wearing, her makeup, and all she knows about *saper*.

It is because of *mikilistes*’s “good life” discourse that all *mikilistes* have been given a bad connotation. This particularly impacts on the local youth, the majority of whom dreams of going to *mikili* so they can become *sapeurs*, enjoy the good food, the star-look which includes dressing

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<sup>223</sup> *Makambo Eyebani vol. 5: Bana Mikili contre Bana Kin*

indecently, men braiding their hair and piercing their ears, extravagant makeup, using inappropriate language such as F and N words in English, etc. In brief, breaking the rules with all the freedom just for the sake of making money and impressing those in the DRC .

Because of this, some *mikiliste* producers have felt the urgent need to produce *théâtres* for “home” consumption with the primary aim being to correct the bad image that irresponsible *mikilistes* have created for all of them. This idea is believed to be brought about by actors who have migrated to *mikili* and who have finally understood “what it is like to be a *mikiliste* apart from *sape* and other futilities.”<sup>224</sup> In their *théâtres*, *mikilistes* have also shown that if they do not always meet the expectations of their people in the DRC, it is not merely because they want to spend their money in *sape*, fancy accommodation, food, etc. They have also shown that how one lives his life is mostly determined by the circumstances they encounter in *mikili*, it is not merely a matter of choice.

## 2.4 The rise of Swahili *théâtres*

Most Congolese people living abroad are able to speak both or at least one of the well-known national languages of the DRC – that is, Lingala and Kiswahili. Even children born in the diaspora speak these languages, which seem to dominate the diaspora. Lingala is dominant amongst diasporic community because of its cultural values, including it being the language spoken in the capital by people from all over the country, as Kinshasa belongs to all *Kinois* but not to a specific ethnic group.<sup>225</sup> Mobutu made it the most powerful language as he made it the national army language, as well as the language of business and celebration.<sup>226</sup> Lingala is also spoken by some people from Brazzaville, because of the history shared by the two Congos from pre-colonial period.<sup>227</sup> Lingala is the language used in Congolese popular music and in *théâtres*, which are mostly produced in Kinshasa. In *mikili*, *Brazzavillois* and *Kinois* are all expected to

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<sup>224</sup> Interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2013.

<sup>225</sup> Interview with Solange, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>226</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>227</sup> See Stewart, *Rumba on the river: A history of the popular music of the two Congos* (London & New York, 2000).

speak Lingala.<sup>228</sup> Many Swahili-speaking Congolese I interviewed told me that they became fluent in Lingala once they migrated, as this has become a language that is very much associated with Congolese-ness internationally.

In the eastern and south-eastern part of DRC, however, Swahili is the dominant language, and is also spoken in Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda (especially after 1994), Burundi, and a part of Uganda. Lingala-speaking people became interested in Kiswahili when Laurent Kabila came to power as his allies spoke Swahili, which became the language of Kabila's army and even of political speeches. Still Swahili never reached the popularity of Lingala, which continued to dominate through music (gospel and popular) and also through Congolese films, particularly, *théâtres*.<sup>229</sup>

Initially, people in the eastern DRC consumed *théâtres* in Lingala. From the 1980s to the 2000 Télé Bukavu broadcasted *théâtres* produced in Kinshasa by the group Salongo, such as *Mwana Nsusu*, *Diallo contre Sans Soucis*, *Libala ya ba intellectuels*; and those produced by the group Minzoto Wela wela such as *Operette Takinga*, *Mwasi moko mibali mibale* (one wife, two husbands), *Nasala nini* (what do I do) and *Ekoyebana* (it will be known), just to name a few. In Bukavu for example, people listen to plays such as *Kapalata* from Radio Bukavu, *Maadibisho ya mzee Lufaheri* from Radio Maendeleo, *Mtu ni mtu* from Radio Maria.

Swahili *théâtres* produced in Bukavu emerged at the turn of the millennium. *Théâtres* were usually kept for onstage performance and/ or to be listened to on radio. More recently, around 2006, Mtu ni Mtu group of radio Maendeleo started producing his videos in Swahili imitating *théâtres* from Kinshasa.

One of these *théâtres* is the famous comedy *Mjinga ata lumiya* (“the stupid one will be hurt”), a comedy showing how people engage in fraud because of hardships. There are other *théâtres* produced by journalist comedians such as Roi Djadja, Pachanga and the late Chubaka, all from Bukavu including *Ona tuu*, *Quel histoire* and *100 dollard*. In Goma (North Kivu), Djasa Djasa and his friends have become very famous through their recent *théâtre*, *Changement de mentalité*, which shows how people fail to adapt with the “civilised” manners including the protocol of being received by someone at a work place or how to behave in public sphere such as

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<sup>228</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>229</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

someone's office. Perhaps the most interesting scene is when Djasa Djasa eats *muwa* (sugarcane) in the office of the secretary when he went to negotiate an appointment. The secretary is irritated and tries to explain to him that the way he messes in his office from eating *muwa* and throwing the remains on his office table and floor was unacceptable, Djasa Djasa took it personally and replied to him that he was shooting at him because he had an office and he does not have one. He also had an incident with another secretary, as he refused to follow the protocol of being received because the boss –the person he came to see –was his brother. He had an argument with the secretary, even promising him that he will get her fired. The boss came out to see what was the problem and Djasa Djasa was shocked to discover that there was a new boss and that his brother no longer worked there. Such *théâtres* aim to educate ordinary people in mutual respect and to advocate a change of mentality. They also remind those on power to be humble and to not look down on those who did not make it to a successful life.

There are also *théâtres* in Kiswahili produced in Katanga and Province Orientale (Kisangani); overall, these Kiswahili *théâtres* are affected by limited circulation and mostly fail to reach the Congolese diaspora. An alternative to Swahili *théâtres* for Congolese diaspora who speak Swahili have been films produced in Tanzania. These Swahili films are usually visualised in the east of the DRC, especially in South Kivu and North Kivu. Swahili films have also been very influential in East Africa, especially in Swahili speaking countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, a part of Uganda, and of course in Tanzania and Kenya where the majority of them are produced. Swahili films – now known as “Swahiliwood”<sup>230</sup> or “Bongo films”<sup>231</sup> – developed alongside Nollywood. Since 2005, Tanzanian Swahili films boomed in North Kivu and South Kivu, in competition with Nigerian films. Nigerian films gained popularity in entire DRC but one has to remember that English as the language of the films was and still is a considerable obstacle for the audience to grasp all the details of the conversations. Swahili films became then popular in Swahili speaking provinces especially in the East of the country but Kinshasa kept generally enjoying Nigerian films and West African serials such as *Ma Famille* (From Cote d'Ivoire).<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> <http://www.mfditanzania.com/index.php/features-mainmenu-47/swahiliwood/item/2-research-swah> (accessed on 17/06/ 2013).

<sup>231</sup> <http://www.bongocinema.com/> (accessed on 17/06/ 2013).

<sup>232</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.



The need for Swahili films in *mikili* has inspired Swahili speaking *mikilistes* to make their own films. There is a potentially growing Swahili film industry in Scandinavia. From online interviewing its founders who live in Scandinavia including Patrick Bashizi of JDP (Joppa Delpatra Production) living in Norway and Roger Kalamba a musician, actor, film writer and director (from Denmark), I learned that their new film industry has been named Scandiwood African Films Production (AFP). These films aim to produce Swahili films that look up to Nollywood and Swahiliwood. Bashizi also mentioned that *La Vie Est Belle* is the first successful film Congo has ever produced and that Mweze Ngagura who produced it is the man he looks up to especially given the fact that he is from his home town, Bukavu.<sup>233</sup> Both Bashizi and Kalamba think that *théâtres* tend to focus on Kinois and their every day. But the Kinois cannot stand for all Congolese; this is seen as increasing the stereotype that Lingala speaking are the only true Congolese.<sup>234</sup> There has been no effort of making *théâtres* in Swahili in Kinshasa, despite the number of Swahili speaking who live there. In fact, other ethnic languages such as Tshiluba and Kikongo are often spoken in *théâtres*. For example, actor Bididi always speaks Kikongo in his performance. Kadiombo and Ngalufar always speak some Tshiluba in almost every *théâtre*. Actors from Kisangani such as Tope could say “...mtoto wa Kisangani” (“one from Kisangani”) to introduce herself but then that is all. Mpaka Lowi has once performed with Lubumbashi actors including Kadiombo, he spoke Swahili fluently but he does not bring it in his *théâtres* in Lingala. This is to show that the problem of the true Congolese identity and the idea that *Kinois* are “Congolese par excellence” is reinforced by Kinshasa *théâtres* which are in Lingala only. This is also seen though Congolese urban culture including cinema, music, fashion and general *Kinois* ways of life as being the authentic language of Congolese. It has been observed by one of interviewee that as soon as one says that he is Congolese to another African, the following question is about Kinshasa, or something in Lingala.<sup>235</sup>

Bashizi, who has lived in Scandinavia for fourteen years, was a musician before he thought of making films with the Congolese Swahili communities of Scandinavia. He started with films

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<sup>233</sup> Online interview with Patrick Bashizi, owner of JDP producer and one of the founder of Scandiwood, Cape Town, 12 October 2013.

<sup>234</sup> People who speak Swahili, especially from South Kivu and North Kivu are usually referred to as “nationalite douteuse” (uncertain nationality) and who “sold the country” given that all the wars always start from these provinces.

<sup>235</sup> Interview with Salima, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

in 2006 but the first that succeeded and through which he became known is *Jabuka* (2011). He plays the leading role; the story is about him having to endure the abuse of a cheating wife whom his parents chose for him in the DRC as an ideal wife after they opposed to his idea of marrying a woman he met in *ulaya* (Swahili for Overseas/ *mikili*). After that, he produced *Tears of Money* (2012), *Remember God* (2013), *Twin Sisters* (2013), and *Jealous Friend* (2013). *Remember God* is a full movie in English, while *Twin Sisters* has subtitles in English. *Jabuka* is a full movie in Swahili from Bukavu. It has been appreciated for the interesting story it tells and its good quality of sound and image by Swahili speaking *mikilistes*, in Tanzania and in Kivu, mainly Goma and Bukavu. Bashizi is working in collaboration with Tanzanian and Nigerian film producers. He also mentioned that sometimes he uses White actors to whom he teaches Swahili from film scripts.<sup>236</sup>

Roger Kalamba moved to Europe when he was five. He is from Goma/ North Kivu. Apart from his interest in Swahili films, he is a successful musician. Like Bashizi, Kalamba understands that *théâtres* have been all about Kinshasa but not really about the entire DRC such as the Eastern part, the Swahili speaking provinces which are the most affected by war. In 2011, he wrote and directed the film *The Pain of Love*. He explained to me that although it is good to maintain certain “originality” in Congolese films, it does not mean that they all have to be *théâtres*. He also believes that if Congolese involved in films are united and work for the same goal, there could be a future for Congolese films in general and Congolese Swahili films in particular.<sup>237</sup>

Compared to other European countries where Congolese are found, Scandinavia has more Congolese from Swahili speaking provinces, especially Bukavu and Goma. Although after the success of *Jabuka* many of the actors left to produce their own films, these Congolese have decided to keep working together from time to time in order to produce better films. Given that they use their own budget, Scandiwood films are made by actors who are willing to volunteer and then be paid after the film is sold. Bashizi is grateful that Norwegian media has been very supportive of their works. He explained that in *Twin Sisters*, he was given an ambulance and a room in a hospital for filming of some scenes. He paid nothing; all he had to do was to tell them

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<sup>236</sup> Interview with Patrick Bashizi, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

<sup>237</sup> Online interview with Roger Kalamba, a film writer, director, producer, and musician, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

when and for how long he needed to make use of the above mentioned facilities. He believes that it has to do with people knowing his life story from DRC especially as one of the *kadogo* (child soldier) who fought next to Laurent Kabila from Bukavu to Kinshasa. Bashizi said that his initiative of making Swahili films is really warmly welcomed and encouraged by Norway media and the entire Scandinavia.<sup>238</sup>

What I question about Kiswahili films of Scandiwood is their own level or effort of including all Congolese given that their producers were very critical of Lingala *théâtres* not representing all Congolese. I found that these Swahili films also focus on lives of people from the east only, mostly South and North Kivu. It is too difficult to see how *Kinois* would relate to their mode of representation or even someone from Lubumbashi. However, their film *Jabuka* is well set compared to Lingala *théâtres* in terms of how they represent *mikiliste* life. When *Jabuka* (the leading actress) was in the village of Bukavu, she is seen gathering firewood, dressed like a village woman (although the entire film is set in Scandinavia). When she arrived in *mikili*, we see her trying to adapt by first behaving like a good wife as expected of her, then she changed gradually by showing that she could play European music on a computer by herself, she also switched to western fashion (boot, miniskirts, jacket, makeup, etc), then from drinking soda to wine and liquors, walking alone in the city for shopping, then being rude toward her husband, going out till late to club with her *mikiliste* friends, then, finally cheating with other men and being caught by Richard (Patrick Bashizi) her husband but who forgave her after pastor and friends intervened.

The costumes were very well selected based on actors' roles and there seemed to be a flow in conversation simply because scripts were provided to actors, which is very rare in Lingala *théâtres*. People were sincere about the pain they endured in their everyday and how they tried to keep up with traditions even when in *mikili*. We see this by the way Richard obeyed his father when he imposed on him a wife chosen by the family in the DRC. Swahili and even Mashi (the dominant Bashi ethnic group language in South Kivu) concepts were used in the conversation no doubt to make it clear where the filmmakers are from and to attract more audience from the East. Language and jargon, places, fashion, and other things associated with *Kinoiserie* are what Swahili filmmakers saw as reinforcing exclusion of other Congolese in Lingala *théâtres* though.

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<sup>238</sup> Interview with Patrick Bashizi and Roger Kalamba, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

When Jabuka got out of control by abusing alcohol, sleeping around and disrespecting her husband, Richard reminds her what he had to endure for him to be able to bring her to *mikili*: “...*niliteseka nasukula masahani, na sukula matako ya baze...*” (“I suffered cleaning dishes, old people’s butts...”). Jabuka explained to him that what she was doing was because she is now in *ulaya*<sup>239</sup>(Europe). For example she replies when asked about why she was having too much to drink: “*nikose kunywa juwa nini? Si ni ulaya!*” (“how can I not drink? This is ulaya!”). The fact that Richard mentioned his previous jobs and his wife explains her behaviour as a “*mikiliste way*” make me think that this film has been the most accurate *mikiliste* representation to date and that all *mikilistes* –*Kinois* and *non Kinois* can relate to the story.

Congoleseness is determined not only by the nationality but also by the hardships it bears locally and transnationally. *Mikilistes* are always tied to DRC, they are often concerned with what is happening “home” culturally, politically, and socially. They still want to conform to all that make them “Congolese” by staying up to date with the country’s information (through social networks, internet, magazine or phone calls). *Théâtres* are among the most important tool of popular culture circulation transnationally. And although many Congolese claim the unity in the diaspora, the discourses of the film/ *théâtres* makers I interviewed in relation to Lingala and Swahili videos leads me to conclude that those two productions are progressing in parallel ways, not in unity but more in a competing manner. A Lingala speaking will always see baSwahili videos as excluding *bato ya Mangala* and vice versa. This is not surprising as the same division is also observed in the DRC since the 1998 war in the east and its occupation by foreign armies. This caused a rupture between the East and West of the country and enmity between baSwahili and Lingala speaking, most *Kinois*. Going back to *théâtres* produced by Swahili and Lingala in the diaspora, I wish to argue that these “divisions” are not necessarily to be taken negatively as I believe they constitute a foundation for better Congolese cinema in the future. Or perhaps one should think of Swahili and Lingala *théâtres* as completing each other. Nollywood itself has issues with Yoruba and Igbo films in the way they portray Nigerian culture and the difference among ethnic groups; however, they are still all regarded as Nigerian films.

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<sup>239</sup> *Ulaya* or *bulaya* is the Swahili version of *mikili*.

### Chapitre 3: *Théâtres* reception and Congolese identity in Cape Town

Congolese of Cape Town watch *théâtres* not only as a way of connecting with home but mostly because they constitute “the most unique” and “original” depiction of Congolese life.<sup>240</sup> The same has been proven by scholars on Nigerian diaspora in Europe and Nollywood films: “through the practice of filmmaking, as well as their products –the films –the immigrant filmmakers have established a means of staying in touch with their home-country and also strengthened the bonds between different communities of Nigerian immigrants in Europe”.<sup>241</sup>

In the previous chapter I have discussed the role of *théâtres* in the lives of the Congolese diaspora and how they help them stay connected to “home”. This chapter deals with *théâtres* reception in Cape Town, based on interviews with Congolese *théâtre* viewers and producers. The outcome of the interviews led me to argue that most Congolese of Cape Town can relate to what they see in *théâtres* produced in the DRC and in the diaspora and that through them, many learn what people are doing at home, their memories are refreshed about the past, while in the meantime they get informed about what is new and also some issues related to Congolese identity that is portrayed through *théâtres* produced in Kinshasa and by *Kinois* diaspora.

The chapter starts by an overview of reception of Congolese film genres, based on information collected from some producers and viewers. Then, it compares *théâtres* produced during the Mobutu era and those produced after his fall and discusses how they circulate transnationally. Then I analyse what *théâtre* audience I talked to had to say on “home” and diasporic *théâtres* and how they portray their lives as Congolese diaspora. Finally I deal with different views on issues regarding men and women as makers and viewers of *théâtres*.

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<sup>240</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>241</sup> S. Samyn, “Nollywood made in Europe,” in Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 118.

### 3.1 Films and *théâtres*

Most of my interviewees could identify the differences between Congolese films and *théâtres* including their running time, sets and locations of filming, the language used, and most importantly, the budget spent and the mode of sponsorship. Examples of well-known Congolese films include *La Vie Est Belle (Life is Rosy)*, *Lumumba*, *Viva Rival!*; and Catholic films such as *Anuarite* and *Bakanja*. It was discussed that in a film, the story is shorter whereas *théâtres* are usually divided into a number of episodes, each running between forty and ninety minutes. A *théâtre* can have between four and eight episodes.<sup>242</sup> Congolese films are usually made in French even though sometimes, they allow some short conversations in local languages but which are directly translated through French subtitles (like we see in *La Vie Est Belle* and *Viva Rival!*).

Films compared to *théâtres* are also said to have a good quality of sound and image and with well-organised dialogues through a number of rehearsing the scripts. For this, films also use bigger budget compared to *théâtres*. Enough money is needed to pay the actors, the cameramen, the editors and the producers. Most locations are paid for; transport, makeup, actors' accommodations and catering, and costumes are also budgeted. Films require intellectual actors, capable of a good expression in French and best acting skills. *Théâtres* are produced regularly by different groups, most of the actors are amateurs and usually the payments are done through other arrangements such as allowing *mabanga* to actors as a form of self-payment.<sup>243</sup>

Congolese films use local actors (at least the main characters) and the producers are also Congolese. This is why not all films on DRC are considered as Congolese. *Lumumba* (by Raoul Peck) is one of those Congolese films that raise controversies given the fact that most of the actors are not Congolese, even the main characters, Eriq Ebouaney who plays Lumumba is a French actor born to Cameroonian parents. The film was shot in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, not a single scene was shot in the DRC. Perhaps this film promoted Congolese history, the political career and assassination of Patrice Lumumba, but it did not promote Congolese cinema nor actors especially given the fact that DRC has some talented intellectual actors whom his people would have much more loved to see acting in great films of their beloved hero and martyr of independence, Patrice Lumumba.

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<sup>242</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>243</sup> Online interview with Profil de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.



*Viva Riva!* was shot in the DRC but most of the actors were brought from the diaspora. Famous *théâtre* actors such as maman Nzita and Gabby (Gabrielle) were given minor roles as drug and prostitute dealer; and a street prostitute, respectively. The major woman character, Manie Malone who played Nora, Riva (Patsha Bay)'s girlfriend is a French actress, who had to learn few Lingala words to play as a young abused and drug addict *Kinoise*. Hoji Fortuna who played the gangster Cesar, is from Angola. Money was spent to make those actors travel from their respective countries of residence to Kinshasa. Also money and time were spent on their training as Patsha Bay himself explained to his interviewers that although he was a musician, he interacted with the camera for the first time as an actor in *Viva Riva!*.<sup>244</sup>

The director and one of the producers of *Viva Riva!* – Djo Tunda Wa Munga – left DRC at the age of ten for Belgium, where he studied and only travelled back for filming purposes mostly for the work of documentary films for BBC.<sup>245</sup> Congolese of diaspora coming to act in big films such as *Viva Riva!* has been judged unfair by some *théâtre* makers such as Bony Beya and Profil de Montreal. Both producers see it as not helping in promoting the country's cinema and actors. However, other producers seem to understand the reason behind the cast of *Viva Riva!*. Roger Kalamba of Scandiwood Swahili films thinks that finding a Congolese willing to play Nora (Riva's girlfriend) could be challenging. Kalamba sees the morality and the Christian identity of most of Kinshasa actors as major reasons. But as Bony Beya said, "We would never know since the actress was taken from France, no one was ever asked about playing that role in Kinshasa."<sup>246</sup>

Most of my interviewees seem to dislike the way *Viva Riva!* portrays *Kinois* culture. Not only the film is full of sexual acts but also the open sexual practice of lesbians and gays in the form of orgy, and also the abuse of drugs and excess of prostitution in the street –all are believed to have been exaggerated by the majority of my interviewees. Bony Beya explained that prostitution, homosexuality, drug abuse and violence exist in Kinshasa but not in the way *Viva Riva!* portrays it. Some also believe that the scenes on violence would fit better if the film was

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<sup>244</sup> <http://camerainthesun.com/?p=7213> (accessed on 22/ 08/ 2013).

<sup>245</sup> <http://icarusfilms.com/filmmakers/munga.html> (accessed on 22/ 08/ 2013).

<sup>246</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

shot in war zones such as Bukavu or Goma and if the conflict was over minerals such as Colombo Tantalite, gold or diamond rather than on petrol oil.<sup>247</sup>

My idea is that perhaps the whole film had to carefully select its ideas, story and plot in order to not attract Congolese authorities' attention which is suspicious about every direction the media takes. But others have seen *Viva Riva!* as an international anti-homophobia propaganda which is good but not satisfying for local Congolese who did not see much of their lives represented in "their" film apart from the exaggerated youth's immorality in Kinshasa. Many parents I talked to explained that they do not want their children to watch the film because of its violence and somewhat explicit sex scenes. In fact, most of them keep referring to the late 1980s film *La Vie est Belle* as the best ever and that *Viva Riva!*, although it has the best images, sound and used more modern technology, is still too far to reach the success many people claim it has.<sup>248</sup>

At least Catholic mission films produced in DRC such as *Anuarite* and *Bakanja, Une Vie Sans Compromis* have used local actors, mostly, young Christians. But the problem is that these films are hard to find in the local market, they are less affected by piracy and are expensive. None of them exist on Youtube. One of my interviewees, Franck has a copy that his cousin bought for him in one of the parishes in Namur (Belgium), he said that his family in Kinshasa could not find a copy in the local market. These films are shown to teenagers mostly in the catechism with the aim of educating them about how a true young Christian should stick to his faith. This is reinforced by the fact that both Isidore Bakanja and Anuarite Nengapeta died young and virgin at 22 and 25, respectively.<sup>249</sup>

The need for better Congolese films has been expressed by all the producers I interviewed. However, some of them are believed to have made films although many refer to them as *théâtres*. *Théâtre* such as *Pasteurs Sans Eglise, Le Fils du President, Msanzi Fo Sho*, just to name a few, are referred to as films by their producers but as *théâtres* by the viewers that I interviewed. The definition of a film is based on the struggle to conform with the so called perfectness of foreign films including Bollywood, Hollywood, and even Nollywood, which H.

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<sup>247</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>249</sup> <http://paulinesav.blogspot.com/2009/09/bakanja-life-without-compromise.html#uds-search-results> (accessed on 24/ 08/ 2013)

Ekuazi sees as “cultural enslavement”.<sup>250</sup> Ekuazi thinks that what should really matter for an African film is its capability to capture the “national image” or “national face”. Therefore, he thinks that the poor quality of sound and image, or using an African language, does not make African films inferior.<sup>251</sup> This is based on the idea that the notion of aesthetic cannot be generalised in cinema in the sense of applying the western beliefs to Africans because the “third world” cinema cannot be “divorced from the very peculiar circumstances of its creation.”<sup>252</sup> However, Congolese film producers and viewers keep referring to Hollywood, Bollywood, Nollywood, and Swahiliwood productions to define and judge their films in terms of aesthetic and so to determine what can be considered as films in opposition to *théâtres* in this case. Some Congolese films and *théâtres* producers see the poor quality of their production as “impacting negatively on the global image of Congolese” in Bony Beya’s words. Roger Kalamba said something similar on how Congolese films, especially *théâtres*, can negatively affect the image of all Congolese: “they make us all look like some lowlife...especially with the way people shout all at the same time, not to mention those *mabanga* and how they are abused and disturbing the entire story...also their choice of venues, not caring about a much better looking place to not expose all the country’s problems...because we will all be judged from that image”.<sup>253</sup>

But despite all, *théâtres* remain the most accessed Congolese cinema genre. Despite their cheap quality and lack of fixed support, they continue to be produced in a big number in the post Mobutu era. *Théâtre* viewers are satisfied, at least to a large extent, with the way their lives are represented in *théâtres*. They are cheap and easily accessed by their audience. Congolese filmmakers do not acknowledge the talents of *théâtre* actors and producers. *Théâtre* actors face the problem related to lack of promoters given that whenever bigger Congolese films are to be made (in exception of *La Vie est Belle*), the actors are foreigners or unknown to Congolese audience. A large budget is spent to pay international and rare Congolese of *mikili* involved while less could be spent if local actors, well-known and admired by local Congolese as well as those of the diaspora are used.

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<sup>250</sup> H. Ekuazi, “Towards the Decolonization of the African Film,” *Africa Media Review* Vol. 5 No. 2 (1991), 99.

<sup>251</sup> Ekuazi, “Towards the Decolonization of the African Film,” 99.

<sup>252</sup> Ekuazi, “Towards the Decolonization of the African Film,” 103

<sup>253</sup> Interview with Roger Kalamba I, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

### 3.2 “I can make you a copy”: Circulation of *théâtres* in Cape Town

In Kinshasa there are many agencies for sending and receiving goods from many places around the world. Congolese DVDs including music, *polémiques*, documentaries, and *théâtres* also travel through agencies, which not only transport them but also sell and distribute them. Agencies have information about new CDs and DVDs including gospel music, incoming concerts, popular music and *théâtres*. Most of these agencies do not have representations in the eastern DRC, The obvious reason being that those places are very unstable and people fear to start businesses there because of wars and pillage. The few *théâtres* produced in Swahili such as those from Bukavu thus face many limitations in transnational movement and often fail to reach diasporic communities.

In Cape Town, *théâtres* can be bought in Congolese restaurants, agencies for freight and money transfer, as well as from individual sellers and *théâtre* makers. They are also exchanged in Congolese charismatic churches, hair salons, and food stores; schools, working places, etc. Many films are copied DVDs which are obtained through piracy. Piracy has been considered as one of the most important form through which African films circulate. Scholars have especially discussed the role played by piracy in circulation of Nigerian films. J. Mistry and J. A. Ellapen wrote for the case of Nigerian and Indian films in South Africa, that piracy “functions as an important second- or third-tier distribution network” and that “piracy boosts their popularity to a certain extent.”<sup>254</sup> Although he wrote that “informal and pirate circulation of Nigerian videos excluded original producers from enjoying the benefits of Nollywood transnational success,” A. Jedlowsky also recognises that “piracy and transnational informal circulation made Nigerian videos travel around Africa and the world, transforming them into a pan-African and global form of popular culture.”<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> J. Mistry and J.A. Ellapen, “Nollywood’s Transportability: Process of Transnationalization in the Nigerian Video Film Industry,” in Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 60.

<sup>255</sup> Jedlowsky and Ellapen, “Nollywood’s Transportability: Process of Transnationalization in the Nigerian Video Film Industry,” 31-33.

Official distributors of *théâtres* are also negatively affected by piracy. Some *théâtre* producers have explained their worries about some of the distributors engaging also in piracy. Profil de Montreal explained that in Belgium there is a producer who would multiply the number of the DVD he was given to sell for his own benefit at a relatively cheaper price. According to him in South Africa the situation is even worse given that many Congolese are dishonest. In fact, anyone with a copy of *théâtre* or film can become a seller. While looking for *théâtres* to watch for this research it was common to hear someone saying “I have a new *théâtre*, I can make you a copy for R20...”<sup>256</sup>

*Théâtres* produced in *Mikili* like the ones produced by Profil de Montreal, are meant to disclose to a “home” audience what it is like to be a *mikiliste*. However, it was interesting to hear Profil de Montreal explaining to me that he did not give his *théâtres* to Kinshasa distributors, because “there are always ways for *théâtres* to reach Kinshasa.” For Profil de Montreal, all Kinshasa distributors are corrupted and deal in pirated videos. Other *mikiliste* producers told me similar stories. For example Patrick Bashizi did not distribute his film *Jabuka* to any one in Bukavu as he was avoiding piracy. But he was called and congratulated by *Bukaviens* for his success in the making of *Jabuka*. That for him was a success although he did not like the fact that his film was being sold in Bukavu by just about “anyone with a computer.”<sup>257</sup> It is only this year (two years after its production) that Bashizi posted *Jabuka* on Youtube.

Other *théâtres* circulate through Youtube, from where people download and share the copies. Profil de Montreal explained that since 2008 there has been an increase in posting *théâtres* on Youtube. Youtube is the easiest means through which *théâtres* can become known by *mikilistes*: it is an easy way to advertise and promote productions even though producers do not benefit from it directly in financial terms. There are people who download *théâtres* which have been posted on Youtube and make copies, which they sell to make a living. But especially those who begin to work in *théâtres* want just to be known, or to be contacted for *mabanga* for their next *théâtre*. Phone numbers of actors and producers are given in the *théâtres* or posted in comments on Youtube. With so much competition in *théâtre* production, being known sometimes becomes the first priority for *théâtre* makers.

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<sup>256</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with Patrick Bashizi, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

My interviewees showed their concern about piracy although most of them do buy “copies” or download *théâtres* on you tube. But producers admitted that it is only through these “cheap ways”<sup>258</sup> (like posting *théâtres* for free on Youtube or putting them available to dishonest distributors) that they can be known especially those who are new in *théâtres* and who wish to introduce their *théâtres* for the first time. However, there have been cases where *théâtre* makers engage in argument over posting *théâtres* for free on Youtube or Facebook. Profile de Montreal explained that his first *théâtre* group dissolved as some actors did not want to understand why he refused to put his full *théâtre* on Youtube. He explained that he used his own money and a little he got from *mabanga* to make a *théâtre*. When it was ready, some of the actors involved put pressure on him to post it on Youtube so people could see it; he was disappointed because his actors were only interested on being known and the comments in a form of compliments that they would get from those who would see it on you tube. A group of actors which left him produced their own *théâtre*, *Pitopale* which they posted on Youtube.

Actors also get involved in pirating their own *théâtres*. Bakari explained that after filming *Bango na Bango*, every actor got a copy of the video. However, some would make more copies and sell them cheaper than their distributors who end up selling nothing because people were getting them cheaper from the actors. This phenomenon has been really too difficult to control as all the producers mentioned. But despite all those challenges, Congolese *théâtres* makers are positive that *théâtres* have shown some sign of progress as many producers seem to be looking up to Nigerian films and hoping that *théâtres* will reach their level one day: “if Nigerian films are still being produced in mass and in even better quality than before despite the level of piracy they experience worldwide, sure *théâtres* will survive”.<sup>259</sup>

### 3.3 Comparing pre- and post-Mobutu *théâtres*

*Théâtres* boomed in the post-Mobutu era just like music and other popular culture, as already discussed in chapter 1. However, this explosion has not been graded positively by all *théâtre* viewers. The main cause lays in the controversial debate on religious and non-religious *théâtres*

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<sup>258</sup> Interview with Bakari Matondo, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

<sup>259</sup> Interview with Prifile de Montreal, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.



groups and how they present their stories and plots. Most of my interviewees positively appreciate the level of freedom of *théâtres* produced at the turn of the millennium: their diversified ways of depicting the everyday of the Congolese and a certain freedom in the choice of themes.<sup>260</sup> Claude (a young Congolese student) puts it, “they expose all the problems in our societies ranging from neighbours’ to in-laws’ conflicts.”<sup>261</sup> Nono (in his late twenties) added that *théâtres* have been very educational especially about what cause those “small conflicts in our societies and how one can avoid them.”<sup>262</sup> Maman Therese, who is in her early fifties, commented that *théâtres* nowadays “have become more interesting with life inspiring stories although sometimes told in funny ways”. She added that during Mobutu’s time, especially during the heyday of the Salongo *théâtre* group, all the plots revolved around “jealousy, affairs, witchcraft/ consulting *marabouts*, and other household issues as if that was all to Congolese life.”<sup>263</sup> The fact that *théâtres* now touch all the facets of life in the cities and represent all social classes including *shege* (homeless children), soldiers, homosexuals, lower class citizens, the complexities of life especially in Kinshasa, has been well emphasised by most of my interviewees. *La Vie est Belle* (film) and *Diallo Contre Sans Soucis* (*théâtre* by the group Salongo) were referred to by my interviewees to explain the fact that affairs, materialism and witchcraft were the major themes of Congolese cinema in the late 1980s. It is true that these films/ *théâtres* were faced by some limitations just like other Congolese mass media during Mobutu’s heyday.

However, not all of my interviewees agree that the post-Mobutu shift represented a progress. According to Pastor Joseph, post-Mobutu *théâtres* are produced in a large number but are less edifying compared to *théâtres* produced in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He stresses that education –which for him should be “moral and religious” – should be the main focus of *théâtre*-makers in their choice of stories and actors. He explains that *théâtres* produced from 2000 onwards are less educational and their production in a huge number has become a mere

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<sup>260</sup> Only those who are now in their forties and above were able to make a proper comparison between *théâtres* of that time and those produced at the turn of the millennium. Youngsters whose ages are below thirty could clearly explain what they see and think of contemporary *théâtres* but they said less about old *théâtres*

<sup>261</sup> Interview with Claude, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>262</sup> Interview with Nono, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013 .

<sup>263</sup> Interview with Maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

“distraction” because of *manque à faire* (“lack of occupation”).<sup>264</sup> Pastor Joseph’s favourite *théâtre* will always be the 1980s’ *Mwana Nsunsu* because their stories and themes were educational. He talked about *Dialo Contre Sans Soucis* as culture-based educational *théâtre*, which however lacks any sense of religiosity although “most of those involved in *théâtres* knew God,” and so, for him, “the conflict could as well be resolved using Christian methods but they chose to end it in a culture-suspense way...”<sup>265</sup> However, Pastor Joseph maintained that *théâtres* produced under Mobutu were more educative than those produced nowadays which he sees as mere comedies with some stories being “helpless and driving youngsters to immorality”.<sup>266</sup>

The “immorality” that Pastor Joseph sees as characterising recent *théâtres* was referred to as “publicities” by Frank, a married man and father of three in his early forties.<sup>267</sup> For him, *théâtres* of the 1980s were comfortably enjoyed by families (parents and children) who watched them together and learned “some useful life lessons”; but “nowadays,” he said, “we are not always comfortable to watch just any *théâtre* with our children because of the strong language used by some actors, the ways actors and actresses dress indecently or the story which almost makes nonsense, for example in *Le Jour le Plus Long* and *Sima Ekoli*.”<sup>268</sup>

Congolese parents of Cape Town I chatted with for this matter strongly believe that *théâtres* are supposed to serve as tools of education with regard to what *être un Congolais digne de ce nom* (in the sense of a “dignified Congolese citizen”) entails.<sup>269</sup> Most of the parents want their children to learn good manners and the morality embodied in Congolese identity as they idealise it. But when *théâtres* are not convincing in how they can contribute to that aim, Congolese parents are reluctant to expose their children to the negativities associated with Congolese life as depicted in some *théâtres*. Adeline explained:

We are already not happy with the way some South African schools impose us to dress our children such as those school uniform skirts that we find extremely short and which we found conflicting with our culture as Congolese. For us, schools are where kids learn the best manners of life and this

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<sup>264</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>265</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>266</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>267</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

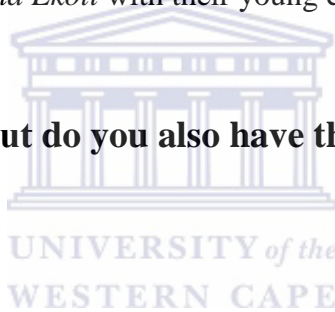
<sup>268</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>269</sup> Interview with Helene, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

is seen through the decent ways children are obliged to dress for schools. Now if our *théâtres* are showing women dressed like prostitutes with legs and half of their breasts exposed, how can we watch these *théâtres* with our kids? You see like those young women in *Mosinzo* and *Sima Ekoli*, we did not want our children to watch those *théâtres*.<sup>270</sup>

*Sima Ekoli* was the most mentioned as one of these misguiding *théâtres*, with indecent students sleeping around with their teachers to pass their subjects and also seducing their landlord, getting him to sleep with them so they do not pay the rent. The young actresses, including the late Masirika and Sila, dress in very short outfits including miniskirts and shorts. They also dance “indecently” in front of their teachers and landlord. This *théâtre* was meant to advertise Werrason’s dance *Sima Ekoli* in his music album *Techno Malewa*. The story also is judged as having no moral lesson for most Congolese parents I interviewed who also find it very uncomfortable for one to watch *Sima Ekoli* with their young children.

### **3.4 “It seems interesting ...but do you also have the Kin ones?”: Home and diasporic *théâtres***



Jonathan Haynes analysed Nigerian films made partially or totally overseas and found out that the Nigerian diaspora is attached to their films mainly because of their “circumstances” including the “longing for home”.<sup>271</sup> Once in *mikili*, actors join existing *théâtre* groups or start their own. However, these *théâtres* are appreciated in different ways by the diaspora/ *mikilistes* of Cape Town I interviewed. Although both local and diasporic *théâtres* are about Congolese lives, my interviewees’ views were clear enough to conclude that “home” productions are the diaspora’s favourite. The same phenomenon has already been pointed out by other African diaspora filmmakers such as Nigerians in Europe. According to Samyn, Nigerian films made in Europe have a lot in common with local Nollywood films in terms of their genre including romance,

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<sup>270</sup> Interview with Adeline, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>271</sup> J. Hanes, “The Nollywood Diaspora: A Nigerian Video Genre,” in Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 74.

drama, and crime.<sup>272</sup> Without imitating Nigerian Nollywood style, Nigerian diasporic films would not gain market even among Nigerian diaspora. *Théâtres* produced in Cape Town and other *mikili* also follow the ways of “homemade” *théâtres* to attract a much bigger Congolese audience in the diaspora and in the DRC.

### ***La nostalgie***

Justin explains that “one does not only enjoy the story and get the updates on what has been happening home, but also seeing the country, the houses, the streets, and especially actors they are familiar to since they were “home”—gives a sense of *nostalgique* feeling about home which *mikiliste théâtres* do not provide.”<sup>273</sup> Scholars have argued that “home” in Nigerian diasporic films is associated with “nostalgic longing and idealization”.<sup>274</sup> The word “nostalgia” came up many times in my interviews. Most of my interviewees mentioned that *théâtres* help them remember “who they are and where they come from.”<sup>275</sup> *Théâtres* are also said to give a “nostalgic feeling about home.”<sup>276</sup> I asked Bony Beya what he meant by *nostalgie* which he also mentioned more than once during our talk, and he said that “...*le pays te manque, et en regardant les théâtres, ça fait renaître en toi les souvenirs d’un certain temps, souvenirs beaux et mauvais...tu sens que tout ça te manques*” (...you miss the country and when you watch *théâtres*, it brings back in you the memories of a certain time, good and bad ones...you feel like you miss all that).<sup>277</sup>

As a *théâtre* producer of Cape Town, Beya understands that his *théâtre*, *Mzansi Fo Sho* does not offer nostalgia to Congolese Capetonians whom he is convinced were not much impressed about his production. As a fan of “home” *théâtres*, he himself understands very well: “we do not have much to offer to Congolese here in our productions because people watch *théâtres* to connect with home and to get informed about home with regard to what is happening socially, economically and some times, politically; it is home they miss and want to see or hear

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<sup>272</sup> Samyn, “Nollywood made in Europe,” 104.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Justin, Cape Town, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>274</sup> Samyn, “Nollywood made in Europe,” 114.

<sup>275</sup> Interview with maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>276</sup> Interview with Sandrine, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>277</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

about.”<sup>278</sup> Beya explained that although he has been involved in *théâtres* in Cape Town as a producer, cameraman, and director, he does not enjoy *théâtres* made by *mikilistes* in *mikili* mostly because “they do not have that ‘home thing’ that we see in Kinshasa *théâtres*”.<sup>279</sup> Even those involved in *théâtres* in Cape Town seem to be more interested in *théâtres* from “home” than their own productions. While convincing Congolese living around Cape Town CBD to buy his *Msanzi Fo Sho*, Beya realised that it was going to be very challenging to get his *théâtres* into circulation as what he often heard was: “*emonani eza bien...ebongo ba nouveautés ya Kin, oza nango te?*” (“It seems interesting ...but do you also have the Kinshasa ones?”).<sup>280</sup>

Thus Bony Beya admitted that there is not much he can impress Congolese Capetonians with in his *théâtres*. He explained that his first targeted audience was people in the DRC whom he wished to “open up to about the diversities of life in Cape Town for Congolese”. He also mentioned that his second audience was the Congolese of “other *mikilis*” so they can compare their lives and that of Congolese of Cape Town.<sup>281</sup> This point has also been mentioned by Profile de Montreal as discussed earlier. Both producers also admitted that even themselves they do not enjoy *théâtres* produced by *mikilistes* because they do not “show home reality although they sometimes have a better quality of image and sound,” in Profile de Montreal’s words.<sup>282</sup>

Sandrine said: “being away from home is what made me fall in love with *théâtres*. In Kinshasa, I was not really fond of *théâtres* but today I really enjoy them and sometimes they make me cry as I long for home every time I see the *Kin ambiance* in *théâtres* especially those scenes shot in *nganda* like in *Suka ya Mwana* and *Mosinzo*.”<sup>283</sup> Doudou mentioned that “*mikilistes théâtres* are mostly boring”. However, she understands that “*mikilistes* are very limited in their *théâtres* because they are mostly shot indoors and do not have enough actors. You see for example in *Pitopale*, people performed in their houses only. It is difficult to relate to any place even if you live in Montreal. Most of their actors are also amateurs who have no experience of performing like in our home *théâtres*.”<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>279</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>280</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>281</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>282</sup> Interview with Profile de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>283</sup> Interview with Sandrine, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>284</sup> Interview with Doudou, Johannesburg, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

### *Local actors*

Not being able to relate to the actors is a very important factor in judging a good and bad or an interesting and boring *théâtre*. It takes some times and a certain number of *théâtres* performed for actors to become known and admired. According to Bony Beya, how they perform, the number of successful *théâtres* and roles they play are the major determinants of their success. He explains that actors are introduced in *théâtres* performed by well-known actors as they give them opportunity of being noticed, but if they perform with unpopular actors in unpopular groups, there is a possibility that they will not make successful careers as *théâtres* actors.<sup>285</sup> This is why some *mikiliste théâtre* producers who can afford it go to DRC to shoot their *théâtres* using famous actors in order to make it circulate easily in terms of being bought or at least watched and enjoyed.<sup>286</sup>

The fact that some of the actors in *Msanzi Fo Sho* were well-known in Congolese communities of Cape Town also had a double and contradicting effect on the selling of the *théâtre*. Beya explained that when he told people about his *théâtre*, some looked at the picture they saw on the cover of the DVD to see if there was someone they recognised. Sometimes they asked: “who are the actors?” Beya disclosed that some became interested in watching the *théâtre* when they knew one or many of its actors. However, for others, the fact that they were familiar with the actors impacted negatively on the whole *théâtre* and how they judged it: they were demotivated to watch the *théâtres*. Bony Beya believes that it has to do with them underestimating the acting skills of those people or simply for personal issues such as a woman who told Beya: “*okamati na ba ndumba otye na théâtre, neti mwasi oyo, ayebani na ba congolais nyioso ya Cape Town ke azalaka moyibi ya mibali*” (“you even use prostitutes in your *théâtre*, like this woman, she is well known by all Congolese of Cape Town that she steals other women’s men”).<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>286</sup> See Pype, “Scripting Kinshasa’s Teleserials Reflections on Authorship, Creativity, and Ownership,” 533-536.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.



### *Picturing disappointment*

Nigerian films produced in Turin have been described as “maps of experience by which Nigerians name their difficulties and hopes for their diasporic conditions,”<sup>288</sup> an idea that can also be applied on Congolese *théâtres* made by diaspora. Most of my interviewees who have watched *mikiliste théâtres*, specifically *Mzansi Fo Sho*, admitted being able to relate to the stories they tell about Congolese of Cape Town. Franck for example said: “I like the fact that they focus on our real lives, like the kind of jobs we do, the conditions under which we live and especially, the deceptions we get from our fellow countrymen like it also shows in *Bango na Bango*.”<sup>289</sup> The *déception* (disappointment) here is defined with regards to what one gets compared to what he expected especially given the fact that relatively developed countries are believed to be “a country where the money tree grows” as G. Santanera quoted one of her interviewees in Turin during her research on Nigerian diaspora and films.<sup>290</sup> As Bony Beya put it “many Congolese come to South Africa following someone, whom they are confident will take care of them by providing all what they have heard about *mikili* from food to clothing, including all the enjoyments of *mikiliste* lives...”<sup>291</sup> For Bony Beya, the expectations of the “newcomers” are very high because they do not understand what a life of a *mikiliste* is really about especially with regard to financial struggle. The idea of *mikili* as a paradise and a place where “every dream comes true” in the words of Franck, usually is the main drive behind people choosing to immigrate. Many are not well prepared about the challenges that await them in South Africa. Bony Beya explained that *Mzansi Fo Sho* is also an illustration of coming to South Africa unprepared and the disappointment thereafter.<sup>292</sup>

*Théâtres* produced in *mikili* aim to correct the image of *mikilistes*, as discussed earlier based on interviews with *mikiliste théâtre* producers. The same has been argued about Nigerian diasporic films, which according to Samyn also deal with “changing Nigerian bad reputation”

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<sup>288</sup> G. Santanera, “Consuming Nollywood in Turin, Italy,” in Matthias Krings and Onookome Okome (eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 245-246.

<sup>289</sup> Interview with Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>290</sup> Santanera, “Consuming Nollywood in Turin, Italy,” 256.

<sup>291</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>292</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

and to expose the situation of African foreigners in Europe.<sup>293</sup> *Mikiliste théâtre* makers also stress that they are not all rich and delinquent as many in the DRC believe and that not all *mikilistes* are involved in illegal activities to earn a living.<sup>294</sup>

### ***The reception of Moscouvitch***

When asked about films they enjoyed the most on *mikilistes*, most of my interviewees in Cape Town mentioned *Moscouvitch* as their favourite among many other *théâtres* made on *mikilistes* such as those I mentioned in chapter one. Many reasons were mentioned with regard to it being so favoured including the depiction of a returning home *mikiliste* by the name Shaba, the main character of the *théâtre*, who was given the nickname of Moscouvitch, and also because of “the main lesson *Kinois* learned about *mikilistes*” in Nono’s words.<sup>295</sup> My interviewees admired the story because unlike other *théâtres* that portray *mikilistes* whether as rich, *sapeurs*, full of bragging or delinquent, *Moscouvitch* shows another side of *mikilistes* which is closer to what most responsible *mikilistes* can relate to including simplicity, education, struggle, and “the lack of shame of going back home empty handed.”<sup>296</sup> As *mikilistes*, Congolese Capetownians understand that they are trapped between surviving in the hardship that living in Cape Town entails and pleasing their families who often expect them to take care of them as soon as they reach South Africa because, as Bony Beya explained: “being in *mikili* equals being rich for our families in the DRC.”<sup>297</sup> Sandrine also said:

I left home (DRC) so young, I was twenty years and I remember I had no right to bring anything in the house that was not given by someone known by the family. I had boyfriends who were always ready to spoil me but I had to lie in collaboration with someone known and trusted by my family to use those gifts. My parents, especially my mother, wanted me to grow up into a responsible woman as they believed that it is immoral to accept gifts from men. I was in high school and they use to tell me that until I finish my university and get a proper job, they would never let me wear clothes or Jewellery offered by my boyfriends. After my *Diplome d’Etat*, I was sent to South Africa to my aunty to take care of me and to introduce me to working life. But just

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<sup>293</sup> Samyn, “Nollywood made in Europe,” 103.

<sup>294</sup> Interview with Profile de Montreal, Cape Town, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

<sup>295</sup> Interview with Nono, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>296</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>297</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

about three months after I arrived in South Africa, my mother was the first to tell that I must start taking care of my young brothers and sisters. She did not bother to ask me whether I got a job or how I was holding up in the new country...<sup>298</sup>

The same idea about how pressures from family and relatives impact on Congolese of Cape Town has been also mentioned by Pastor Joseph:

Most of our family members do not even care to ask their children how they survive in South Africa or where they get the money and things they send to send. They are the main reason why our brothers and sisters engage in illegal and unhealthy activities such as prostitution, drug dealing, crookery, and so on. I have seen many Congolese shaming us in Johannesburg but even here in Cape Town, we have our brothers engaging in unspeakable behaviours such as family men prostituting themselves to other men so that they can impress their families in Congo with money and other fancy gifts.<sup>299</sup>

Although Pastor Joseph is not fan of contemporary *théâtres*, he admitted that *Moscouvitch* is one that he enjoyed exceptionally because “it shows that patience pays and it helped *Kinois* understand that not all *mikilistes* want to impress their families by making them think that *mikili* is the best place to live because there, goods and money are picked up so easily.”<sup>300</sup> *Moscouvitch* is an exceptional example also because he is one of the few Congolese who give up *mikilism* to go and work for the development of the country, something that many people do not want to do because they care too much about “being called “*mikilistes*,” a name that most *Kinois* enjoy even if it means cleaning public bathrooms with a *Licence*<sup>301</sup>, a degree that could get him a decent job home.”<sup>302</sup> Bony Beya also added that *Moscouvitch* returned “home” and did not bother the way his whole neighbourhood and family mocked him for being so poor after “*trente ans na mikili*” (thirty years in *mikili*) as it was often repeated to him.

Some of my interviewees, however, admitted that it takes a lot of courage to endure all that as a returning *mikiliste*. In fact, Claude admitted that “it is actually when we think of all those

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<sup>298</sup> Interview with Sandrine, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>299</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>300</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>301</sup> Licence refers to a five years degree in DRC. In South Africa its equivalence is Honours degree.

<sup>302</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

humiliations that we do not want to go back because they will not understand how you can not afford to buy a house, or to open a business or spoil your family with fancy gifts.”<sup>303</sup> Claude is a student himself and sees *Moscovitch* as a “warning” about what to expect when he returns in the DRC after his studies.

Most of those who seem to like *Moscovitch* are Congolese students in Cape Town I interviewed. They feel like it speaks to their lives, especially those who intend to go and work in the DRC after their studies. *Moscovitch*, thus, is seen by Congolese of Cape Town as one of the kinds of DRC *théâtres* on *mikilistes*. This is seen through the way it depicts the hardships of the life in *mikili* by emphasising the long years *Moscovitch* spent in *mikili*. It is also a good illustration of the challenges *mikilistes* face once back “home” through the complications *Moscovitch* went through to find a job in his own country despite his degrees from *mikili* and the scarcity of people of his qualifications. But the happy ending is encouraging for *mikiliste* intellectuals as *Moscovitch* happened to be connected to someone who gave him a job through his friend with influence to those who provide jobs. Therefore, *Moscovitch* is also a depiction of the level of corruption and what Swahili speaking refer to as “*mujuwano*” (having social contacts such as relatives or friends in the employment network who can help or facilitate to get employed) which most Congolese of Cape Town find being the main reason why many reconsider going back home to find work after being trained in *mikili*.

### ***La Sape in théâtres***

Dressing smart even when one plays a homeless role in *théâtres* is something important because it plays an important role in identifying a *théâtre* not only as a Congolese (*Kinois*) but also as one distinguishing *mikiliste* and “home” *théâtres*. However, some *théâtre* and film makers and viewers seem to have a serious problem with *sape* and how it is abused in *théâtres*. For example, Roger Kalamba and Patick Bashizi, both Scandiwood filmmakers see the idea of *théâtre* actors not dressing according to their roles as “not making any sense” in Bashizi’s words and “affecting the message that *théâtre* gives” as Kalamba put it. But Salimas said she likes the *pagne* fashion in *théâtres* especially those produced in DRC because it inspires her in making her own clothes

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<sup>303</sup> Interview with Claude, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

in Cape Town. She also said that for her, *théâtres* are about “seeing people looking good” and that “it is the story that matters, not really how who dresses how...”<sup>304</sup>

Most of the Swahili speakers I interviewed from Lubumbashi and Kivu see *la sape* as a “*Kinois* thing” and something that “ridiculously distinguish *Kinois* from Swahili speaking” in Patrick Bashizi’s words. But Bony Beya explained that not all *Kinois* would live for *sape*, he thinks that it has also to do with “the level of education” as most of *Kinois* who have university degrees tend to be “simple and humble” in the way they dress up.<sup>305</sup> But most of my interviewees agree that Congolese are identified (by themselves and other Africans) through the way they dress up and wear their makeup.

### 3.5 “It is a woman thing”: Gender and *théâtres* reception in Cape Town

Inquiring about the gender dimension of *théâtres* reception in Cape Town, I received complex and contradictory answers. Most men I talked to seem to have a problem with the way women tend to be, in Pastor Joseph’s words, “addicted to *théâtres* and other African films such as Nigerian, West African, Tanzanian and even South African films.”<sup>306</sup> Paul, who is a married man in his late thirties, also added that “women will sit down to watch *théâtres* one after another; that they sometimes forget to attend to their domestic duties when there are new *théâtres* in the house.”<sup>307</sup>

The issue of going around looking for *théâtres* to borrow or to exchange was also mentioned: “my wife does not mind to take a train from Stellenbosch to Cape Town just to collect some *théâtres* and Nigerian films.”<sup>308</sup> For Lievain, it is even more irritating when his girlfriend spends a whole day at their neighbours in front of their computer watching *théâtres* online: “you know she obliged me to buy a modem so she could stop bothering neighbours without thinking that it was already too difficult for the two of us to live with what I was earning

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<sup>304</sup> Interview with Salima, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>305</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>306</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>307</sup> Interview with Paul, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>308</sup> Interview with Paul, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

as a barman at Bukhara, not to mention the hundreds of *théâtres* and Nigerian film CDs laying everywhere in our bedroom and she still made me buy them all the time.”<sup>309</sup>

Most men are irritated when they are back from work and find their wives/ partners watching *théâtres* enjoyably. Some consider it to be a sign of laziness. But another problem comes when both man and woman work, when they get their days off work, the woman has her *théâtres* to watch while the man wants to spend time with his woman. This again is a serious issue for couple’s lives as Pastor Joseph revealed: “do you know how many marriages have broken because of *théâtres* and Nigerian films? Many women would forget to cook or leave their husbands alone in bed because they have *théâtres* and Nigerian films to watch, especially those who have DSTV.”<sup>310</sup> Pastor Joseph said that as a “man of God”, he listens a lot to couples’ problems and that one should not underestimate the negative impacts of *théâtres* and Nigerian films on marriages.

Men I interviewed also revealed that they watch *théâtres* and Nigerian films occasionally compared to women. Most of them see these films as a “women thing”. Bony Beya said that he only watches *théâtres* when he happens to be in the sitting room when his wife is watching one. He also said: “I rarely finish a *théâtre*. You know, some of them have four to six episodes each running for about an hour or more. I often watch it in pieces but it is my wife who often tells me how the story ended.”<sup>311</sup> Claude also explained “I sometimes watch only the first part and I would guess how the story ends but my roommate would go around asking for a missing *théâtre* part because she is so obsessed to see the end”. I asked some women about what they think of those men’s “accusations” and their reactions were interesting. Some of them even confirmed that what men said about *théâtre* being a “woman thing” was to a large extent true.

According to Adeline, women enjoy *théâtres* more than men. She said: “if I see an interesting *théâtre*, I would ask my husband to watch it with me. But usually, I feel like he does it just to please me.”<sup>312</sup> Although Adeline admitted that her husband happens to download *théâtres* for her on Youtube, she understands that he is not as fond of them as she is. Whenever a *théâtre* is interesting, her husband would come and watch only “the funny scenes” by actors that

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<sup>309</sup> Interview with Lievain, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

<sup>310</sup> Interview with Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>311</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

<sup>312</sup> Interview with Adeline, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.



he knows such as Vue de Loin, Pululu, Eyenga and Bidibidi. Her husband never finishes a full *théâtre* and some times, as she explained: “we argue because I am forcing him to stop his work so he can watch a nice *théâtre* that he brought me.”<sup>313</sup>

Working women had rather different thoughts on how often they watch *théâtres* based on the idea that women are more obsessed with *théâtres* than men. Women who work often do not have time to sit and watch *théâtres* or African Magic TV channels with its mostly Nigerian films. As Salima said: “when I used to work, I never got much time to sit every day in front of the TV unless I was off. Also during my off days, I would take care of my children and husband. I could spend a week trying to finish a *théâtre*...”<sup>314</sup> Even Maman Therese acknowledged that “the only reason why men think that women love television is because every time they come back from their occupations, they find them sitting in front of it.”<sup>315</sup>

There is also an idea that unemployed men watch TV the whole day. Maman Therese talked about “newcomer”<sup>316</sup> men as also being obsessed with *théâtres* especially before they get jobs. For Maman Therese, these men are still very *nostalgiques* about “home” and watching *théâtres* make them feel that “they are not too far from home.”<sup>317</sup> Congolese who have just arrived in South Africa take some time before they can get occupations because it takes time to be able to communicate in English. In the DRC, youngsters spend time wandering around, chatting with their friends, visiting relatives; but in South Africa most people work and an appointment is needed even for one to see his neighbour. Consequently, one sits in his house and watch *théâtres* to keep the time going.

During her research on Pentecostal *théâtres* in Kinshasa, Pype was informed that men in Kinshasa believe that TV is often watched by women and children although her own observation proved that even men watch *théâtres*.<sup>318</sup> In Cape Town, women also mentioned the fact that men love TV but just that they enjoy different programs. Salima explains that her husband would sit the whole day in front of the TV browsing from one sport channel to another and if he does not

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<sup>313</sup> Interview with Adeline, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>314</sup> Interview with Salima, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>315</sup> Interview with Maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>316</sup> Congolese men who have just arrived in South Africa

<sup>317</sup> Interview with Maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

<sup>318</sup> K. Pype, *The Making of Pentecostal Melodrama : Religious, Media, and Gender in Kinshasa* ( Oxford – New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), 287.

see what he is interested in, he would watch Mnet channel because he enjoys American films, but still he would ask his wife “how did that *théâtre* end?”

For some men, *théâtres* are also their favoured films. Paul explains that he preferred American films when he was in Congo but that since he arrived in Cape Town, *théâtres* are his favourites. He explains that he has his friend who sell them to him and who keeps him posted about the new interesting releases. Paul said that after his security job, especially when he works dayshift, he would sit and enjoy his *théâtres*. He also explains the importance of “not laughing alone” and so, he prefers to watch them with family and friends because “sometimes, it is a good story played by interesting characters... I always want to tell the story about the *théâtres* I watched if it is a good one or made me laugh. So, because there is no way I can bring out that ‘acting thing’, I like to wait for my wife or brothers so we can watch it together,” he said. For Paul, *théâtres* are more enjoyable in a group. He also disagreed with the idea of *théâtres* being a “woman thing” because he thinks that “the lesson learned concerns both men and women.”<sup>319</sup>

### ***Women actresses***

M. Krings and O. Okome argue that “while women were almost absent from the first and second generations of African auteur filmmakers, they do play strong roles in Nollywood film productions.”<sup>320</sup> Many of my interviewees appreciated that women have made progress not only by their increasing number in acting but also by the fact that they play leading roles in many contemporary *théâtres*. Bony Beya explained that *théâtres* during Mobutu’s time such as *Diallo Contre Sans Soucis* and *Operette Takinga* did not really put women in front but rather as objects of men’s ego.<sup>321</sup> Most importantly, in the post Mobutu era *théâtres*, women have used their acting to react to the way society has been treating them.

Some *théâtres* producers I talked to acknowledge the power that playing without fixed scripts give to actors, especially actresses. Bakari Matondo explained to me that there have been times when an actor said something that he later regretted but it has to stay in the *théâtre* as he insisted: “we do not have ‘cut’ or ‘let’s do it again’ as you see when filming for

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<sup>319</sup> Interview with Paul, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

<sup>320</sup> M. Kring and O. Okome, “Nollywood and its Diaspora: An Introduction,” in Matthias Krings and Onokome Okome (eds.) *Global Nollywood: The Transnational Dimensions of an African Video Film Industry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 15.

<sup>321</sup> Interview with Bony Beya, Cape Town, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

Hollywood...”<sup>322</sup> However, not everyone regrets what he says even if it does not please the producers. Women in *théâtres* would use their roles to make their voices heard about what they believe to be unfair to their gender. Maman Tope and Kalunga are actresses that most of my interviewees recognised as “very rude” in Nono’s words.<sup>323</sup> However, both actresses are also praised as being among the best in contemporary *théâtres*. They are mostly judged by the way they perform generally including the way they speak which Bakari described as “natural, interesting and funny”. These two actresses are also believed to perform as if “they were not making *théâtres*” as Paul put it while we were discussing *Nkolo Lopango* and how both Kalunga and Tope performed their extremely “immoral women”. Tope was a mature woman sleeping with a young male student while taking care of all his needs. Kalunga was allowed by her husband to sleep with the landlord as a way of paying rent. These women spoke well to explain what they were doing and their main message was that no one was in a position to judge them as what they do is for a good cause, as Bony Beya made me reason. I therefore argue that performing without scripts gives women in *théâtres* the opportunities to speak their minds against men and the society rules that victimize them.

How women dress up in contemporary *théâtres* have also been mentioned. And although some of my interviewees criticised it (mostly those who think of themselves as conservative or religious), I argue that these women are mainly trying to adapt a celeb look as they see other women doing it in cinema like in Nigeria, Tanzania and West Africa. Another reason could be that these women want to show the control they have on their bodies and their level of emancipation in the sense that they no longer feel they need to conform to the moral codes based on their patriarchal ideologies. In non-religious *théâtres*, women are not shy to dress up to celebrate their beauty even when they know that it will be judged “immoral” by conservative viewers.

In conclusion, the discussion in this chapter shows an improvement in Congolese cinema in the post-Mobutu era in terms of their quantity, a certain liberty in the choice of themes, the increasing number of women playing leading roles and also the facility with which they reach

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<sup>322</sup> Interview with Bakari Matondo, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

<sup>323</sup> Interview with Nono, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Congolese wherever they are. However, *théâtres* are still reluctant to involve openly with the problems the country faces at political level, a fact that I already stated characterised Zairian popular culture. And like codes are used to hide political themes in *théâtres*, my interviewees were also very reserved in answering questions about political messages that *théâtres* convey. My research also shows the need for Congolese films (Nollywood and Swahiliwood styles) as emphasized by most producers, but it also indicates that films and *théâtres* are understood as strictly two separate genres in Congolese cinema. Therefore, films cannot substitute *théâtres* which are appreciated by their audience as unique through their particularities including the language they use, their stories and themes, and the actors and their spontaneity (acting without fixed scripts).

Finally, this chapter's findings shows clearly that *mikilistes* of Cape Town can relate to the way *théâtres* produced in the DRC and in *mikili* depict their lives and the large extent to which they speak to their identity. However, I argue that this representation is characterised by both senses of belonging and exclusion/ denial as most *théâtres* focus on life in the capital –Kinshasa, and also through the fact that in the diaspora, most *théâtres* are produced by *Kinois* (also in Lingala). *Kinois* seem to claim the “true” Congolese identity locally and in the diaspora while BaSwahili keep feel excluded and sometimes embarrassed by “*Kinois* culture” which generally stands for Congolese culture. This is seen through phrases such as “it is a *Kinois* thing” from Swahili speakers I interviewed. I therefore argue for the need for *théâtres* in Swahili which focus on the particularities of people in Swahili speaking provinces, not necessarily to compete with *Kinois théâtres* in Lingala but also to add to the diversities associated with Congolese.

## Conclusion

Even with the end of Mobutu's regime, the life of Congolese people did not improve as was expected by many. Economic struggle reinforced by corruption and unemployment and the multiple insecurities caused by war have led many Congolese to think of other ways of surviving, including leaving the country in the quest for better life. However, the last decade shows the country's development particularly at cultural level – including music, an increase in charismatic churches, cinema – not only as a means to generate income but also as a way of expressing themselves. This thesis has explored *théâtres*, a particular genre in Congolese cinema, produced in the post-Mobutu era; especially the ways in which they are produced and consumed by Congolese diaspora. I have focused on both local and diasporic *théâtres*, how they portray the lives of Congolese diaspora (*mikilistes*) and how they speak to Congolese identity in general and Congolese diasporic identity in particular. I have focused on Congolese of Cape Town as my case study.

Although there is no doubt that Nigerian, francophone West African and East African (Swahili) films have highly influenced the way *théâtres* are produced en masse and their stories ranging from church prophecies to the power of ancestors and witchcrafts, this research shows that *théâtres* do not merely copy the above-mentioned cinema styles, mostly because their primary audience is Congolese, being more specifically those who can understand and speak Lingala, the language in which they are made. Although many Congolese *théâtre* and film makers agree that Congolese *théâtres* should be developed along the lines of Nollywood and Swahiliwood, *théâtres* seem to do just fine in Lingala as they are produced in big number every year based on their audience demands. The main reason behind the thriving of *théâtres* lays in the fact that they depend totally on local and diasporic Congolese sponsorship, unlike “big” and “successful” films which depend on foreign funding. Unlike Congolese films, *théâtres* are easily accessed by Congolese. *Théâtres* have highly progressed in the post Mobutu era and to a large extent, they have achieved a certain independence from serving state-driven agendas. However, they are still reluctant to openly deal with the politics of the country as an open theme. Rather, they have remained a comedy of the everyday with concealed political messages.

Congolese identity is claimed by those in the DRC as well as the diaspora. This work, however, made it clear that Congolese diasporic identity is different from Congolese identity. I have demonstrated this by discussing the dialogues that those who are “home” and those abroad engage in through *théâtres*. *Théâtres* on *mikilistes* produced in the DRC are all about what they believe differentiate them with those in *mikili* including their arrogance and somewhat good life. *Théâtres* produced by *mikilistes* are mostly responses to these “home” productions and disclose the reality of their lives especially all the challenges they face on a daily basis in *mikili*. *Mikilistes* explain why they cannot meet all the demands of their relatives in the DRC; in the meantime, they brag about their *mikilism* including the comforts they enjoy in *mikili* and what they do or are willing to do for their families. Although *mikiliste théâtres* are mostly about the struggle for survival in *mikili*, those in the DRC still see them as a motivation and invitation to a better life away from DRC.

Finally, I defended my view that *théâtres* constitute an evidence to support the extent to which *Kinois* culture tends to impose itself as the “Congolese culture” not only in the DRC but also abroad to all Congolese. *Théâtres* that are produced in Kinshasa and in *mikili* are mostly in Lingala. Also, most researches on Congolese popular culture including music, fashion (*la sape*), and films, have been conducted in Kinshasa or in *mikili* among Lingala speaking mostly from the capital. My argument is strongly supported by Lingala words or concepts mostly found in Congolese popular culture academic publications; generalised conclusions on the Congolese are drawn from studies conducted on Lingala-speaking people. Some (if not many) Congolese Swahili-speakers challenge the notion of Congolese identity that is portrayed through *Kinois théâtres* and other forms of popular culture (in the DRC and abroad). However, Swahili *théâtre* and film makers’ objectives are not wholly different from the *Kinois*’ as they focus more on a cinema that highlights what makes them different from *Kinois* rather than thinking of one that bring them together by focusing on what all Congolese have in common. These competitions between Lingala and non-Lingala speaking could be the beginning of a more diversified Congolese cinema.



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## **Théâtres**

### ***DRC théâtres***

*Akomi Nzambe*

*Bala Bala*

*Bazua Bakelela*

*Chocolat Partout*

*Conscience Zero*

*Diallo Contre Sans Soucis*

*Element Dangereux*

*Essobolo*  
*Fashion*  
*Le Jour le Plus Long*  
*Le Parisien Refoule*  
*Lifelo ya Mundelo*  
*Maboko Pamba*  
*Mikilistes*  
*Mouscouvitch*  
*Mpunda*  
*Muzungu le Belgicain*  
*Makambo Eyebani vol 5 : Bana Mikili Contre Bana Kin*  
*Mwana Nsusu*  
*Nani Aya Naye*  
*Nkolo Lopango*  
*Grand Pretre*  
*Pasteur Pete Pete*  
*Pouvoir*  
*Vieux Chinois*  
*Operette Takinga*  
*Oyo Bolukaki*  
*Zokisa Ngolo*  
*Zunguluke*  
*Mjinga Atalumiya*  
*Changement de mentalities*  
*Ona Tuu!*  
*Quelle Histoire!*  
*100 Dollar*



***Théâtres of Diaspora***

*Msanzi Fo Sho* (Cape Town, South Africa by Bony Beya, 2010)

*Pitopale*(Montreal, Canada by JTM, 2013)

*Infidelite* (Montreal, Canada by Profil de Montreal, 2011 )

*Mabe Zero* (Johannesburg, South Africa )

*Na Pona Nani?* (Johannesburg ,South Africa, 2004)

*Bango na Bango* (Johannesburg , South Africa by Pascal Bakole 2013)

*Pasteur Sans Eglise* (London, United Kingdom by Kass Kasongo ,2011)

### **Films**

*La Vie Est Belle* (Mweze Ngangura, 1987)

*Viva Riva* (Tunda wa Munda, 2010)

*Lumumba* (Raoul Peck, 2000)

*Jabuka* (Patrick Bashizi and Roger Kalamba, 2011)

*Isidore Bakanja*

*Anuarite Nengapete*



### **List of Interviewees**

#### ***Congolese théâtre actors and producers***

Bony Beya, a Congolese professional cameraman, Congolese *théâtres* producer in Cape Town. He has been a mentor for this research, I have interviewed him more than once regarding my research. The most important interview was conducted in Cape Town on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2013.

Rock Bokabela, *théâtre* actor, producer, human right activist who lives in Kinshasa (DRC). The interview was on cellphone, I called from Cape Town on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

Patrick Bashizi, a Swahili film producer, director and actor in Norway and owner of JDP production. He is also one of the founder of Scandiwood films. Skype interview, Cape Town, 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Roger Kalamba, a musician, film producer, director, actor and writer who lives in Danemark. He works is one of the co-founders of Scandiwood. Interview conducted in Cape Town via Skype on 12 October 2013.

Pascal Bakole (Sans Rival): the manager of the group theatral of La diaspora de Jobourg. Interview conducted on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

Profil de Montreal, a *théâtre* producer, director, writer and actor who lives in Canada. Interview conducted on 12<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

Bakari Matondo, the son of the late legend of Congolese comedy, Mathieu Matondo (Sans Soucis). He is the actor of the Diaspora de Jobourg, interview conducted on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

### *Théâtres viewers*

Nono, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Pastor Joseph, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Claude, Cape Town, the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Solange, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Adeline, Cape Town, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2013.

Barbra, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Salima, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Maman Therese, Cape Town, 8<sup>th</sup> April 2013

Olga, Cape Town, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013.

Emmanuel, Cape Town, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2013.

Sandrine, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Paul, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Alain, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Helene, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Franck, Cape Town, 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Pacho, Cape Town, 10<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Jacky, Cape Town, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Justin, Cape Town, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Fidele, Cape Town, 13<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

William, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Doudou, Cape Town, 28<sup>th</sup> May 2013.

Lievain, Cape Town, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

Chadrack, Cape Town, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013.

Sylvie, Cape Town, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013.

Julia, Cape Town, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013.



Fidele, Cape Town, 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2013.

