

Mediating Matonge: relocations of Belgian postcoloniality

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Abstract

In this paper I look at the Matonge quarter of Brussels as a locus of postcolonial and diasporic imagination and activism by different groups and individuals most notably by Africans in Belgium. Within a longer historical narrative that starts in the late 19th century, I focus on the period beginning in the late 1980s when new migrational flows from Africa and other southern countries into Brussels make the Matonge quarter increasingly visible and present in an otherwise hesitantly globalizing Belgian/European metropole. This is taken up by several filmmakers who over the last twenty years have situated their critiques of the Belgian postcolonial condition in 'Matonge'. In this paper I briefly present four of these films in order to illustrate the ways in which 'Matonge' features in changing discourses of inequality, cultural affirmation, and diasporic activism.

Four films

Sango Nini, quoi de neuf?

1991 - Anne Deligne & Daniel De Valck

Changa-Changa, Rythmes en Noirs et Blancs

1992 - Mweze Ngangura

Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l'Europe

2002 - Patoma Gboya & Pulusu Homban

Juju Factory

2006 - Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda

Text

I. Introduction

[1] In this paper I seek to present the city quarter called Matonge in Brussels as a locus of postcolonial diasporic imagination and activism since the early 1990s. Stated otherwise, I seek to spell out how Matonge as a physical/discursive place is being invented, renegotiated or reconstructed in relationship with the changing ways in which larger-scale entities – Ixelles, Brussels, Belgium, ... – rework their postcolonial condition, reflect on their cultural diversity, and the predicament of their migrant and diasporic communities, more particularly the subsaharan ones. In practice, I will look into a number of films. These films have been produced over the last decade and a half, and are mostly documentaries although one is a fiction film. In these films ‘Matonge’ appears as a place which somehow exemplifies changing discourses of inequality, cultural affirmation, and diasporic activism with respect to Africans and/or ‘blacks’. Overall, I discuss four films and will show excerpts from three of them.

[2] Matonge is part of the commune of Ixelles and located in the southeastern part of Brussels, just outside the old city centre, at about five hundred meters from the royal palace and in between two upmarket zones: the European ‘Leopold’ quarter and the Avenue Louise. Habitually, the shopping mall Gallérie d’Ixelles is considered the (hidden) heart of Matonge, while the adjacent Chaussée de Wavre and a traffic-free section of the street Longue-Vie (Langlevenstraat) are now seen as the city quarter’s main limbs.

[3] Obviously, films are not the only media formats in which Matonge has been represented. The painting “Matonge-Ixelles: Porte de Namur - Porte de l’Amour” by Cheri Samba, is certainly one of the most well-known representations of Matonge.

[4] Until a couple of months ago a photographic blow up of the painting measuring 15 by 12 meters decorated the façade of a department store at ‘the entrance of Matonge’ near the Porte de Namur. Mounted in 2002 this gigantic painting could be seen mediating Matonge to itself, its residents and shopkeepers, its café owners and travel agents, as well as to its many regular and occasional visitors. Moreover, given the public-private partnership which made this possible, this canvas also epitomized official recognition of Matonge and its economic growth potential.

[5] Like Cheri Samba’s intervention in Brussels’ public space, the four films which I will present, can be seen as mediating ‘Matonge’ in different ways. For starters, the films present images of the urban neighbourhood. Also they capture, quote or contest existing ‘representations’ or imagery of Matonge. Finally also the filmmakers, their collaborators and informants, their official supporters and their financiers function as mediators in providing and circulating new representations of Matonge.

II. Presentation of the four movies

[6] *Sango Nini, quoi de neuf?* (1991 - Anne Deligne & Daniel De Valck)

Anne Deligne & Daniel De Valck are both Brussels-born directors — Deligne is from Ixelles — and have been involved in the relatively small film company, Cobra Films, whose choice of projects shows a clear commitment to the non-mainstream, the socially or culturally marginalised peoples or individuals everywhere, but particularly in Africa. The first film produced by Cobra films was called *Zaire, maîtres des rues* (Zaire, masters of the streets, 1989). In this documentary Dirk Dumon (scenario: Jean-Pierre Jacquemin) dealt with popular culture in Kinshasa's and Kisangani's public spaces, more particularly popular painting and new (pentecostal, charismatic) churches. In this film one meets a relatively young, but already well-known Cheri Samba. Both directors recently worked together as producers for the film *Le Cercle des Noyés* (*Drowning in Oblivion*, Cobra Films, 2006) directed by Pierre-Yves Vandeweerd about the victims of the 1980s Mauritanian repression of the pro-black movement FLAM.

Sango Nini claims to portray how people in Matonge “search continuously for their *country* through music, colors and words”. Moreover, the release note specifies:

“They live with us, they walk in our streets. They dream [behind] our walls. [and yet], our eyes rarely meet.”

In suggestive sentences such as these, it becomes sufficiently clear that this film sees itself as dealing with a typical diasporic situation: a strong orientation of diasporic groups towards the home ‘country’ combined with a parallel, partly invisible existence elsewhere — to the extent of being considered ‘out of place’ or living a ‘double absence’ (Sayad 1999). Such diasporic condition results, according to Clifford’s well-known phrase in “alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference” (Clifford 1994: 308).

[7] *Changa-Changa, Rythmes en Noirs et Blancs* (1992 - Mweze Ngangura)

Mweze Dieudonné Ngangura is a Congolese filmmaker who has been based alternately in Zaïre/Congo and in Belgium since he finished art school in Brussels in 1975. He has made many films, short films and documentaries. In 1980 he made his first documentary about Cheri Samba, who was then a relatively unknown young popular painter in Kinshasa. In 1986 he made *La vie est belle* which starred the musician Papa Wemba — a collaboration which was repeated in his latest film *Les habits neufs du Gouverneur* (2006). In 1998 he made *Pieces d'Identité*, so far his most famous and celebrated film about Congolese immigration to Belgium and partly situated in Matonge. In between both films Ngangura made *Changa-Changa*, a documentary about the lively international, and above all intercultural music scene in Brussels from the late 1950s onwards.

The film opens with scenes shot in Matonge in which Manu Dibango tries to locate the place of the now defunct music clubs such as *Black and White* and *Les anges noirs* (both in the Stassaert street,

very near the Porte de Namur). For Dibango, these clubs were the places where music from Africa and 'black' music from the New World enjoyed each other's company and reached a mixed audience in late colonial Belgium and a rapidly decolonizing Brussels. In *Changa Changa* Ngangura presents this moment as the onset of the musical globalisation of Brussels/Belgium; a process which was carried on by the likes of Victor Lazlo, Khadja Nin, Zap Mama, and Toots Thielemans. One of the most remarkable aspects of *Changa Changa* is the cosmopolitan framing of (part of) Matonge in combination with the fact that he is marking Belgium's colonial projects in Africa as the origin of — what Abdoumalig Simone (2001) would call — the worlding of the metropole.

[8] *Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l'Europe* (2002 - Patoma Gboya & Abel Pulusu Homban)

Both Abel Pulusu Homban and Patoma Gboya (or Pat Patoma) are audio-visual entrepreneurs as well as journalists at a Brussels city radio station. The station called *Radio Air Libre* caters for a number of special interest groups such as the gay and lesbian communities, the antiglobalisation movement, prisoners, anti-militarists, different music publics (such as hip-hop, *chanson*, and heavy metal), several languages communities (Spanish and Portuguese, e.g.), and a number of regional communities (Latin-American, and indeed, also African) or a combination of the two, such as the Africa-related Lingala-spoken weekly programme *Afrika Djamaa*, for which Pulusu and Patoma both work.

As the title of the film indicates, the documentary *Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l'Europe* focuses on the spatial dimensions of the Matonge city neighbourhood, and does so at the beginning of the film and several times later, in a number of quite dramatic episodes which predict nothing less than the imminent demise of the 'African quarter'. Besides this, it strongly engages with the temporal dimension, the history of Matonge and, above all, the memories of those who have lived to see the African city quarter carving itself an urban space in a country in which Africans have remained generally speaking quite invisible. The central actors who embody respectively the beginning and the end of this time line are women — elder women, some of whom set up their businesses in Matonge back in the 1970s — and youngsters. In the film these youngsters are somehow taken under the wings of both the women and the filmmakers in order to protect them against the allegedly false accusations voiced by local authorities and which typecast them as mere drug dealers and violent trouble makers.

[9] *Juju Factory* (2006 - Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda)

Balufu Bakupa-Kanyinda is a writer and filmmaker. He was born in Kinshasa but resided mainly outside the country after finishing his studies of sociology, philosophy and history in Brussels. Among his documentaries, the one about *Thomas Sankara* (1991) is one of his first while *Afro@digital*, a UNESCO-sponsored documentary on the digital revolution in Africa is among his most recent. So far, Bakupa-Kanyinda has gained particularly high praise with his film *Le Damier* (1996). This film is a captivating story of the surreal interactions between an African dictator-draughts player and his adversary, a simple, hungry and subaltern citizen.

Juju Factory is a fiction film built around — what one critic called — a “kaleidoscopic narrative” about a writer named Congo Kongo (played by Dieudonné Kabongo) who sets out to write a book about Matonge, the Brussels town quarter where he lives with his wife. One of the other main characters is Joseph Désiré his tyrannical editor. The latter insists on Congo Kongo writing a light-hearted exotic travelogue titled *Matonge Village*, while the writer gradually opts for a project and a book named *Juju Factory*. Both in its historical, psychological and conceptual scope, *Juju Factory* is more grand and sophisticated than the three other ‘Matonge’ films. Above all this film carries a heavy load of diasporic desires and above all fears. As the film maker explains himself, the idea of the film came during a trip to the slave castles Elmina in Ghana. This idea, objectified in the shape of juju, Bakupa-Kanyinda tells us, he brought to bear on the Matonge city quarter. The concrete Belgian past which the film brings into view harks back to 1897 when 250 [check] Congolese men and women were shipped to Belgium to feature in the colonial section of the Universal exhibition, but the film also recalls the murder of Lumumba. Psychologically and conceptually, the film maker displaces the diasporic ‘double consciousness’ and explores the multiplicity of attitudes and identifications of Congolese and Africans which he explicitly defines as ‘in exile’ in Belgium.

Part III: Matonge as locus of postcolonial imagination and activism

In this section I look into the four films as instances of the different ways in which ‘Matonge’ is a locus of postcolonial imagination and activism. Overall, I try to make the point that Matonge is in any straightforward, natural, physical, or demographic way, a city quarter. Over time and in different discourses and practices, I argue, ‘Matonge’ is a different thing altogether. In the analysis that follows, I distinguish between ‘Matonge’ (a) as a geographical ‘point’ of reference in an emerging discourse of diversity and emancipation, (b) as a ‘place’ (spatiotemporal unit) occupied by a community, and (c) as a ‘site’ of multiple identity formations and multiscalar political activism.

In each of these cases, I am interested in how references to, representations of, and interventions into the social and discursive space of ‘Matonge’, offer some insight into the changing postcolonial condition of Brussels/Belgium and into diasporic or exilic agency of Africans therein.

[10] A. The invention of Matonge as a geographical point of reference (‘a point’) in an emerging discourse on cultural diversity and emancipation

The Matonge that appears in *Sango Nini, quoi de neuf?* (1991) is mainly the city quarter that a small group of insiders know as the place of African/Congolese ambiance — e.g. it is the heyday of the SAPE (*La Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes élégantes*) (see Amponsah & Spender 2003; Gondola 1999) — relatively hidden in the central shopping mall and a number of clubs/café’s in its vicinity. But this relative invisibility is diminishing rapidly from the late 1980s onwards.

The early 1990’s is a turning point in the growth of Matonge when it becomes the destination and place of contact of Africans/Congolese who are part of the post Cold War ‘new migration’. By then,

the era of gradual influx and partial reflux of students, merchants, etc. from Congo and a few other African countries, is over. Together with the rapid breakdown of what Abdelmalek Sayad (1999: 114) calls “the myth of the temporary and short-term nature of migration” people start to realise that hundreds of thousands of people residing in Belgian cities and towns are there to stay and are seeking to find a proper place in Belgian society.

Parallel to this recognition of the presence of a substantial migrant population residing in Belgium in the late 1980s, one observes the rise of anti-migrant political parties (mainly in Flanders). Parallel with this, new institutions – such as the *Koninklijk Commissariaat voor het Migrantenbeleid (KCM)* – are created in order to monitor and manage migrant groups residing in Belgium, also in the hope of mitigating widespread anti-migrant feelings. At this stage, there was (and to a large extent still is) a rather ambivalent attitude which may accept that migrants are given full access to things like schooling, housing, jobs, etc. while it proves more difficult to allow cultural diversity at least in the public sphere (Blommaert & Verschueren 1998; Arnaut, Ceuppens & Delanote 2007). The following excerpt from *Sango Nini* shows, I think, that the film makers, try to address both the socio-economic and the cultural side of the acceptance of African migrants in Belgium. Although the film is situated in Brussels in general, several times reference is made to Matonge.

Excerpt : Student & woman. After they have managed to find a flat, the woman discusses the issue of finding a job.

[11] The two aspects which I want to highlight are the story itself (about the African student and his wife who is into ‘jobs’) and the African ‘griot’ kind of voice-over (by the Congolese actor Maurice Boyikasse Buafomo who labeled himself recently as “Conteur Médiologue”). We begin with the latter.

As just said, the early nineties is the time when Africans, together with other European and non-European migrant groups gain visibility. This triggers recognition and appreciation by some Belgians and depreciation and contempt by others. It must be clear that this documentary takes a positive attitude and does this under the aegis of a cultural appreciation. One of the ways in which this is done is by having the voice-over foregrounded and explicitly marked as ‘African’ in the form of some sort of ‘griot’ voice, who announces that nothing (scandalous) will be concealed. This is the onset for revealing that African residents find it very difficult to gain access to the Belgian housing and job market. Thus, the griot and the film claim that Africans in Brussels— to paraphrase Virginia Woolf — deserve to earn money and a room of their own. To what an extent the filmmakers see the installation of Africans in Brussels in terms of multicultural juxtaposition or of intercultural collaboration, is difficult to make out. The least one can say is that (a) bits of both options are present in this newly emerging discourse concerning cultural diversity and the emancipation of minority groups, and that (b) ‘Matonge’ serves as a geographical point of reference in this emerging and at times rather ambiguous discourse (see Blommaert & Verschueren 1998).

In his very own subtle way Ngangura in *Changa Changa* joins into this emerging discourse by using ‘Matonge’ as geographical reference point and springboard. One of his important contributions to

the formation of this new discourse of diversity is that Ngangura adds a historical dimension which leads back to (late) colonial times. With the help of Manu Dibango, Ngangura asks attention for a short period of racial interaction and the breakdown of colonial barriers in the years preceding the independence of Congo. This intercultural renaissance is presented as short-lived. It is in full swing in 1958, the year of the World Exhibition and the foundation of 'Les Amis de Présence Africaine' bookshop and small conference centre near the Porte de Namur. Two years later this 'renaissance' comes to an end with the debacle of the decolonisation of Congo which results in the partial re-enclavation of Africans in Brussels (and the move of Dibango back to Africa and then to Paris). A further important element is that through the story about the nightclubs of the Stassaert in which American, Caribbean and African artists and music meet, the element of 'black' (diasporic) culture is brought in, indeed, never to disappear again as one of Matonge's characteristics (see e.g. *Juju Factory*).

In sum, in both documentaries Matonge is not so much presented as a place in its own right, but rather as a geographical point of reference for an emerging discourse of cosmopolitanism lost and (expectantly) refound, of postcolonial amnesia and misrecognition or at least disregard for cultural diversity and the long-term and future presence of migrants in Belgian society.

[12] B. Matonge as a proper spatio-temporal unit ('place') occupied by a community

As said, the Matonge town quarter presented in the film *Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l'Europe* (2002), has definite borders, a history, and is populated/occupied by a community of Africans, represented by women and youngsters. Arguably, this invention of Matonge as a proper place is the outcome of suffering or at least the perception/experience of suffering undergone by Africans and more often than not in and around Matonge.

Several authors have observed that victimisation can be a strong factor in processes of identity formation. In his seminal text on diaspora and identity, Gilroy (1997: 319) speaks of Afro-American "identity defined [...] by [...] histories of unspeakable suffering." (see also Broch-Due 2005: 19). In general one could say that the film constructs history, space, and community out of three aspects of this suffering: a history of repression, mainly during the 1990s, a present in which the boundaries of Matonge are under threat from property developers who serve the elites living in the upmarket zones bordering Matonge ('Louise' and 'Leopold'), and a future which is compromised by the fact that the youngsters of Matonge are discredited as unruly and indolent if not inherently violent and criminal.

Indeed, in the early years 2000 Matonge looked back on a distressing decade of bitter antagonism and a series of violent confrontations with the city council and the security forces (state and communal police). Simply stated this was the outcome of the increasing numbers of people from poor or migrant backgrounds frequenting Matonge. These people (not in the least youngsters) hurt themselves to a defensive society and to offensive security forces. The defensive attitude of Belgian society was epitomized by that of the city council which at the time was led by a right-wing major (who is shown several times in the film) and his middle-class and upper-middle class constituency.

The film indicates that these white elites reacted against the expansion of Matonge and thus the Africanisation of an erstwhile upper class white urban quarter. The offensive attitude of the security forces at that time consisted in them operating outside any schemes of dialogue or consultation, and seeing violent repression in the form of *razzia*'s and other large-scale interventions, as the only adequate means of action. In the 1990s, apart from youngsters, also down-market shops and restaurants were the target of city council inspection and retribution.

Moreover, from the year 2000 onwards, people in and around Matonge became more aware of this situation of suffering because in 2000 a new city council was elected and a left-wing coalition came into power. As is pointed out in the film at least twice, the new council effected a sea-change. One of its first projects was a quite radical change in dealing with the issue of Matonge by opting for collaboration, dialogue, joint projects of security, and of community policing. The official recognition that came with the creation of an official Matonge policy and of Matonge policing, went hand in hand with a whole number of 'grassroots' and PPP-initiatives in which Matonge was said to show its potential and its positive qualities.

The excerpt from the film that we are about to see reminds us that the invention of Matonge as a proper or 'full' place or territory, is based on a trajectory of suffering which forms the basis for empowerment and the rejection of any past, present, or future form of paternalism or the infantilisation of Africans.

[13] Excerpt: Maison Africaine & interview Yves De Jonghe d'Ardoie + comments by Kungu Luziamu (president of Interface Culture, one of Matonge's main mediators/gate keepers).

[14] In a particularly trenchant way, the excerpt shows the two faces of what is seen as the depreciation of African presence in Brussels, and Matonge. First the film confronts the current management of the Maison Africaine, which since the early 1960s provides accommodation for Africans studying in Brussels. In the way the Maison Africaine is presented, one easily senses the colonial character also exhibited by the paternalist words of its manager. Second, the passage on the Maison Africaine is followed by a passage in which the negative judgements of the erstwhile major are contradicted. Because both passages are commented upon by the same person (Kungu Luziamu), the entire sequence makes it appear as if the liberation from (neo)colonial paternalism represented by the Maison Africaine is a source of empowerment for defying right-wing intolerance embodied by the former major.

Stated otherwise, 'Matonge' of the early years 2000 arises out of the debris of a long-overdue decolonisation of African-Belgian relationships, and of the repressive regime of the city council in the 1990s. Out of this Matonge rises up as a proper place — a spatial unit with a history and occupied by people who guarantee its reproduction, *and* in the process, makes a name ('Matonge') for itself.

It helps here to remind us of what Doreen Massey said about the invention of what she calls "the coherence of a place":

"The invention of tradition is here about the invention of the coherence of a place, about defining and naming it as a 'place' at all." (Massey 1995, p188)

The ‘place’ called Matonge then is very much the place in which Heatherington (1999) after de Certeau (1984) saw:

“the capacity [...] to naturalize existing social relations *and* the ability of people to carve out spaces and moments of cultural engagement in which those relations could be recast and recontextualized.” (Heatherington 1999: 316)

Perhaps not coincidentally, in 2002 — also the year the film was released — ‘Matonge’ received the photographic blow up of the painting by Cheri Samba. Put in the discourse of the film, this gigantic canvas was employed to display the name of Matonge, signal its vital existence, mark its territory and show its human capacity to whomever approached it from the Brussels’ city center. In the same year the makers of *Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l’Europe* — to paraphrase Heatherington — carved out a named place called Matonge in which they recast Afro-Belgian relations which were suffering from both undeconstructed colonial attitudes and new-style post Cold War intolerance and xenophobia.

[15] C. Matonge as a site of multiple identity formations and alliance building

The ‘Matonge’ that appears in *Juju Factory* in 2006 is firmly established as a city quarter. By 2006 Matonge enjoys official recognition from the different authorities that intervene in Brussels, that is, the Ixelles city council, the Brussels regional government and the governments of the Flemish and Francophone communities. Moreover these authorities found local and regional organisations ready to collaborate in manifold projects of emancipation and affirmation.

Since 2001 Matonge has its annual feast *Matonge en Couleurs/Matonge Gekleurd*. The latter is organised with ample financial support from the Ixelles city council by an organisation called *Interface Culture* which is presided over by the Congolese cultural entrepreneur Kungu Luziamu. Interface Culture has the explicit goal of “promouvoir une image positive du Quartier Matonge”. Since 2004 Matonge has also a radio station called *Radio Matonge* that broadcasts intermittently, for instance during the annual feast (www.noctis.com/radiomatonge). Since 2006 Matonge has a socio-cultural centre *Espace Matonge* financed by the Brussels Capital Region (Ministry of Mobility) and has a cultural shop *Afrikamäli* set up in 2006 by the city council in collaboration with local commercial organisations. Soon also Matonge will have a ‘Flemish-African House’ funded by the Flemish Minister of Culture, Sport, Youth and Brussels Affairs. The creation of such ‘houses’ is part of an overall strategy to increase the cultural presence of Flanders outside its own region: first of all in Brussels — besides the *House of Dutch* (Huis van het Nederlands) which was created in 2004, an African-Moroccan House was opened in Brussels in June 2007 — but there are plans to create such a Flemish house also in Kinshasa.

In sum, in the years separating the 2002 Matonge film and *Juju Factory* anno 2006, ‘Matonge’ is officially recognized and to some extent institutionalized. Also it has its own marketable profile as a playing ground of multiculturalism whereby Matonge is often typecasted as colourful, cosmopolitan, and exotic. With this official and commercial objectification, I submit, Matonge

enters into a complex, multiscalar space of identification and positioning (See Hall 1990; Li 2000). This space comprises not only more global relations such as those between Europe and Africa or between Belgium and DR Congo, but also subnational relations such as the ever more problematic cohabitation of the Dutch-speaking community and the French-speaking community in Belgium, which both have their say in matters of education and culture in the bilingual Brussels region. Some aspects of this can be found in the passage of *Juju Factory* which I show now.

Excerpt: main personages Joseph-Désiré (despotic publisher) and Kongo Congo (writer -). The central scene shows an ‘undocumented storyteller’ who is also a ‘Dutch-speaking African’ who is arrested by the police and wins an air ticket to South-Africa.

Before we look into the matter of multiscalar identification and positioning, let us first take notice of the way in which *Juju Factory* deals with violence, repression and suffering – the phenomenon that was thematised so strongly in the previous film and that was of central importance, according to me, in the invention of Matonge as a ‘place’. In the excerpt the confrontation with the police of Ixelles (typical of the 1990s but not entirely absent afterwards either) is presented twice. First ‘repression’ is presented as ‘real’ in the footage that seems to provide from a grassroots filmmaker. Thereafter the Ixelles police reappears in mock form, when the bizarre storyteller is received at the police station whereby the latter almost turns out to function like a travel agent for undocumented aliens. Further on the theme of repression, one could add that the historical despotism of the Mobutu era reappears in *Juju Factory* in the form of the dictatorial publisher Joseph Désiré who in himself, in his insistence on writing mellow and easily digestible literature, embodies commercial despotism and the dictatorship of the market. Anyway, the way suffering is dealt with in this passage is rather typical of the way Balufu tells a multiplex narrative using a mix of genres and of styles of narration, which open up ‘Matonge’ into the complex space of identification and positioning that it currently is.

In the excerpt we see a personage, the bizarre storyteller, who after his visit to Joseph Désiré is arrested by the Ixelles police. The latter soon finds out that the undocumented (*sans papiers*) oral artist is a Dutch-speaking ‘African’. Conjugating Africa with Dutch, the mainly French-speaking policemen end up with Afrikaans and South Africa as his homeland. This they spontaneously declare to be the destination of his free of charge return flight.

This scene is by far not the only one in which the French-Dutch opposition is presented. Brussels’ bilingual predicament is personified by nobody else than the central character of the film, the writer whose name, we learn in the excerpt, is Kongo Congo. This oddly repetitive name is not without meaning. Early in the film we see the writer (Dieudonné Kabongo) walking through the streets of Brussels and taking a look at the typical Brussels bilingual street signs, in this case, that of the “Rue Congo/Kongostraat”.

The larger context of this is, I argue, that once recognized as a territorialized community, the Belgian-Africans enter the complex play of Belgian communitarian politics. In this play of

identification and positioning internal divisions within the African community are articulated in terms of pro-Flemish or pro-Francophone stances.

So we have seen, for instance, the rise of strong anti-Kabila constituency who accuses former Belgian foreign secretary and now European commissioner Louis Michel, his fellow party member, Minister of Development Cooperation, De Decker, and their conservative, upper middle class entourage as conspiring with president Kabila of DR Congo to continue the (neo-colonial) plundering of Congolese natural resources. Using the rhetoric of the Flemish economic success, one has seen the rise of small movements which plead for closer Flemish-Congolese collaboration.

One instance of this was recently documented by Bambi Ceuppens who interviewed Mariyus Noko Ngele, a Belgian-Congolese of the anti-Kabila movement who pleads for a retreat from Congo by the Francophone Belgian politicians and entrepreneurs. Also, he reserves a privileged place for the Flemish in a forthcoming Congo Belgian economic union. The name of his movement, Ceuppens (2007) reports, is *L'alliance des Réformateurs Kongolais*. Need I, dear audience, to point out that Kongolais in this name is spelled with a K? Congo Kongo.

[12] Part IV: Conclusion

I set out to present to you how in a number of films Matonge is given shape as a locus of postcolonial and diasporic imagination and activism by different groups and individuals most notably by Africans in Belgium. In conclusion, I would like to briefly indicate the different ways in which this 'locus' called Matonge — successively as a 'point', a 'place' and a 'site' — corresponds with three dimensions of diaspora.

In *Sango Nini* we find most clearly represented what Safran (1991: 83) saw as one of the main conditions of diasporic communities, namely that “they believe that they are not [...] fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it.” Arguably, in *Sango Nini* this insulation is shown from within 'host society' whose exclusionist attitude is revealed and deplored. Around the same time, a similar attempt is made from the more in-between position of somebody like Ngangura.

Changa-Changa, however, does not so much denounce the marginalisation of the African parallel society, as it shows its erstwhile creativity and its present-day saliency for the cosmopolitan music scene in Brussels. Within the “alternate public spheres” of diasporic communities (Clifford 1994: 308), more particularly in the late colonial, parallel public sphere of black night life and popular culture in Brussels, Ngangura situates the beginning of the musical globalisation of Belgium — perhaps a continuation of the gradual opening of the Black public sphere of the Harlem Renaissance in the United States.

Matonge, un quartier africain au cœur de l'Europe then, further thematises the typical diasporic theme of “...a shared history of displacement, suffering, adaptation, or resistance” in a process of “identification and differentiation” (Broch-Due 2005: 19). The sense of pan-Africanism that

pervades this film is identified by Gilroy as one of the possible effects of diasporic identification: the fact that one easily forgets, according to Gilroy (1997: 323) that “Identity is the compound result of many accretions. [It] does not defer to the scripts of ethnic, national, ‘racial’ or cultural absolutism.”.

Without therefore abolishing the issues of historical suffering, present discrimination, or parallel lives, *Juju Factory*, seems to transcend easy antagonisms and recomposes diasporic identities around the concept of ‘exile’. Although Gilroy (1997: 330) would perhaps not have chosen the word exile, the exilic identities in the film very much shows what Gilroy also observed, namely how diaspora “provides valuable cues, and clues for the elaboration of a social ecology of cultural identity and identification” (ibid: 332). Interestingly enough, in Gilroy’s view ‘exile’ evacuates the complexity of “yearning and ambivalence” that resides in the concept of diaspora. ‘Exile’, for him implies a reconciliation either with the place of sojourn or with the place of origin, and this taming of diasporic subjects, according to Gilroy, is accomplished when the nation-state disambiguates diasporic identities in a logic of either full inclusion or exclusion. Looking at *Juju Factory*, we realize that Gilroy was perhaps thinking of an ideal-type homogenous and monolithic nation-state, but certainly not the fragmented nation-state called Belgium which Balufu encountered. In that country, the advanced multi-level governance finds its apex in the administrative region of Brussels where federal government, the two languages communities, and the 19 different communes share and divide power (see Favell & Martiniello 1999; Arnaut 2005). This multiscale governance situation offers a number of opportunities, particularly to the exilic or diasporic groups, Favell and Martiniello (1999) argue:

“[The latter] have often found the cleavages and ethno-national conflicts inherent in the Brussels situation, and the institutional structure of city and communes useful to their goals; the declining role of the state in Brussels has helped free them to pursue economic and cultural activities which escape state control and regulation, and permit strong territorial ambitions in the city. Certain new activities and channels have thus become effective, and immigrant groups have been creative in reconfiguring their collective identities around the opportunities as presented, even connecting up on occasions with unlikely allies such as the Flemish right or the EU elite.” (1999: 19)

All this is put in a rather dramatic tone, but it basically boils down to prosaic processes of networking and building alliances in an ongoing process of positioning and identification as described by Hall (1990:30) when he alleges that:

“Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position,…”

This politics of position reveals what Cohen sees as the peculiarity of the relationship between ‘exilic’/diasporic groups and the nation state, namely that “for such diasporas the nation-state is being used instrumentally, rather than revered affectively” (Cohen 1996: 518). Thus, Cohen (ibid.:

520) concludes “seen as a form of social organization, diasporas have predated the nation-state, lived uneasily within it and now may, in significant respects, transcend and succeed it.”

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Filmography

The importance of being elegant. George Amponsah & Cosima Spender, UK, 2003

But they were also essential for Müller's imperial comparative religion that mediated between "civilized" Great Britain and the "exotic" and "savage" peripheries of empire. While his edition of the Rig Veda and his expertise on the religious heritage of India were made possible by the financial support of the East India Company, Müller's imperial comparative religion rested on comparative observations that depended heavily on the British possession of South Africa. Orientalism and The Rise of "Protestant Buddhism". Many of the westernized middle-class groups that emerged in Southeast Asia as a result of European colonial reforms first encountered their own Buddhist traditions through the mediating lenses of European