

“The fox takes his food in the village”

Folkloric Music, Wit and Ownership in Kinshasa

Kinshasa's music

“Modern” or “popular” music
(f.e. Papa Wemba, Koffi Olomide)

Religious music
(f.e. GAEL, Moïse Mbiye)

“Folkloric” or “traditional” music
(f.e. Kintueni Star, Sobanza)

“World” or “research” music
(f.e. Jean Goubald, Lokua Kanza)

“Yankee” or “*décalé*” music
(f.e. Kotazo, Mbeya Mbeya)



Sobanza Mimanisa
headquarters
(Selembao Market)



Folkloric music in the Belgian Congo

Pushed on *Radio Congo Belge* (Grabli 2019)

Idea of primitive Africa

→ Colonially digestible

<> Popular music: unruly and part of Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993)

Mobutu (1965-1997) - Authenticité

Animation politique

“At the time of Mobutu, it provided [money]. Here, now nobody takes care of you. But Mobutu took care of that. Some people bought parcels, they left even, to Europe, they did tours. I am exhausted. In Manianga there were groups like GTRAMA, they have become old, they are no longer capable. Will he [a younger artist] have the heart, the means? *Matanga* [funerals] do not bring in anything. Manianga [Kongo subgroup] are stingy, aren't they.” (Papa Mansia, Kinshasa 2019)

“Modern” vs. “traditional” music?

Bob White (2008:32)

Modern: language (Lingala) + Instrumentation (electric guitar)

Tom Salter (2011:4)

Modern: “positive disposition towards change and newness”

+ bigger “African” modernity debate (Comaroffs, Ferguson, ...)

The birth of popular music

“As the Congolese rumba matured, its language began to change. A song in Spanish still came out from time to time, but singers of Kikongo, Tshiluba, and Swahili turned increasingly to the emerging vernacular, Lingala [...] The music’s popularity spread Lingala to the farthest reaches of the two Congos. Its use had the effect of eliminating the ethnic baggage that songs in, say, Kikongo or Tshiluba would carry, giving them more universal appeal. Lingala ‘de-tribalized’ the music as well as the Force Publique, Léopoldville, and, to a lesser extent, Brazzaville.”

(Stewart 2000: 77-78, similar ideas in a.o. Mukuna 1979 and Gondola 1997)

Highlife
American-Latino Rhythms

French chanson

Boy scout chants
Religious choirs
Military bands

Traditional music



Gondola 1997

Congolese popular/modern music

Folkloric music

Franco Luambo – Yimbi (1958)

Ko yimbi ko

Ya yimbi tuala muana mu yi

yemike/yemika

Ko yimbi ko

A mono yi buta muana wu keyange

Hawk oh hawk

Give me back my child so I can feed it

Hawk oh hawk

Give me back my child that I am

weeping for



Franco Luambo – Luvumbu Ndoki (1966)

- Pentecostal hanging (1966)
- Luvumbu, head of his family “eats” all his peers
- Critique Mobutu - banished

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-wNAgzXqfl>

Zaiiko Langa Langa – Atalaku shouts

“Atalaku! Tala! Atalaku mama! Zekete!”

(Look at me! Look! Look at me, mama! Zekete!)

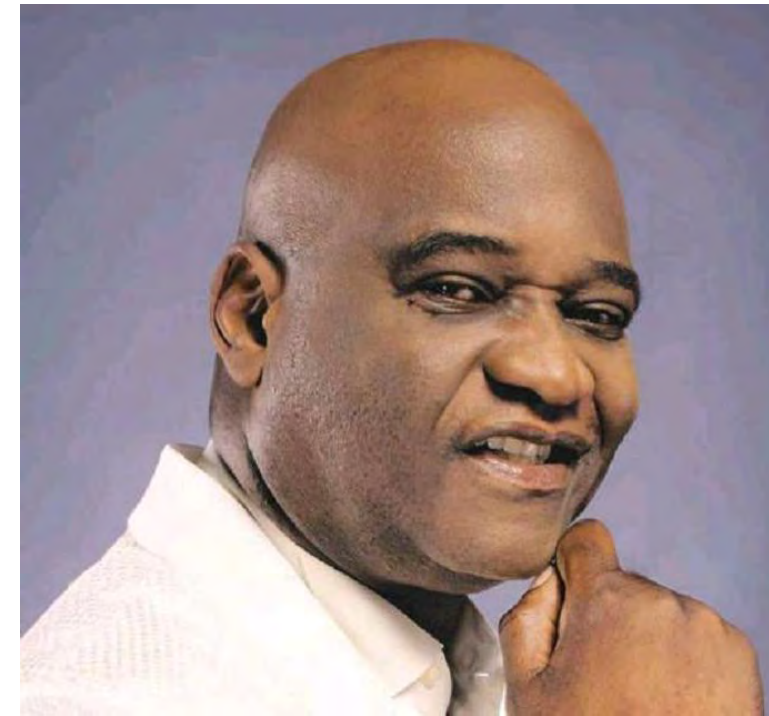
“Emama mfuenge ya ntete bakila ku vata dila ku finga”

(The fox takes his food in the village and eats it in the forest)

“Mbuta Mbilenge, wazola dya, wazola yukutu” (Familia Dei)

(Sage Mbilenge, he likes to eat, he likes to eat till the core)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajlldHs3cYg>



Zenga Luketu – Werrason (2017)

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxjugM-OWeg>
- “Close hips” in Kikongo
- Chorus based on Ntandu mourning song



Werrason – Zenga Luketu

“Inspiration ya *Zenga Luketu*, Margot, ezali musique traditionnelle. Epai na biso, tobenga yango musique folklorique. C’est à dire, oyo ya village, oyo ya mboka penza. Parce que moderne ezali, traditionnelle ezali. Omoni, bakoko na biso kala babeta musique ya bango, mais inspiration na bango ezalaki kowuta surtout na ba oeuvres d’art, biloko moko eza boye un peu ancestral, biloko moko eza un peu, comment, different par rapport au neti tomonaki baguitares elektroniques, basynthe[sizer].”

“The inspiration for *Zenga Luketu*, Margot, is traditional music. At our place, we call this folkloric music. That is, from the village, from the countryside really. Because there is modern, there is traditional. You see, before our ancestors played their music, but their inspiration mainly came from artworks, these things are a bit ancestral, these things are a bit, how shall I say, different from the electric guitars and the synthesizers we see.” (Kinshasa, 2017)

Luketu Lu Mbwa – Zenga Luketu

“You know that these modern music people minimize the people that make folkloric music. So, the reason why folkloric music is more powerful than modern music. For example, you take Werrason’s current song, Zenga Luketu [...] it is performed in Kintandu [...]. In many of the current songs in Lingala, they seek recourse to folkloric songs. Folkloric music is rich compared to modern music. So the Lingalaphone people are stealing our traditional arts and that is providing them wealth now [...] They benefit on our behalf. And we, we are taken for little nobodies.”
(Kinshasa 2017)



Dani Boloko (Sobanza) – Zenga Luketu

“We are not like these BCBG, Maison Mère, [two bands of the Wenge Musica clan] Victoria [Eleison, band of King Kester Emeneya]. You release a song, there is no such thing as your friend cannot perform it. You first need authorizations, pay rights; no. With us, you compose your song, when you release it people are happy. You are free to play it, you can perform it without difficulties, interpret the song, because we are tradition.”
(Kinshasa 2019)



Werrason – Zenga Luketu

“Congolese musicians that sing “world”, it is plagiarism! It is real plagiarism. You see that the music he plays, they play it already in Nigeria, they play it already in Cameroon. He only took the music and put in his words. He did not do anything. [...] Whereas, I, I go to the back of beyond. That which is ours here, ours in Congo. I go, I ask, that’s it. [...] Today, for example, he (pointing at one of the Congolese men at the table), you say, I play Werra’s music, it is like it is yours, but if you go to strangers it is very bad. You know, back in the old days, Michael Jackson paid a lot of money. Mamase mamasa mamacoosa, it was something like that. He committed plagiarism, he did not know, but that’s how it is nowadays. But *Zenga Luketu*... [mimics bell sound] It’s the *ngongi*! [...] Music of the Lower Congo, of [the province of] Kongo Central. I went to them, I valorize their music. I now added a BEAT!”



SELUMUKA NGWASUMA

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“Real” country?

“Yet if the music is always changing, and if its genealogy is vague and hard to substantiate, and if it has grown ever more distant from its rural roots, how can any country performance today be defined as authentic? The short answer is that all of these questions become immaterial when the focus is on the character of the artist, not on the history of the genre. That is, if *real* country musicians perform the music, then it *is* country music, whatever the instrumentation, orchestration, or venue.”

(Lindholm 2008: 33)

Conclusive remarks

- Distinction “traditional” vs. “modern”: societal position & gatekeeping
- Permanent influence of folkloric music
- Impact Mobutist *Authenticité* (and its decline)

Thanks for listening!

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