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“I do not want to marry my ngatiul”ⁱ

Mass-mediated alliances between youngsters and Pentecostalism in Kinshasa

Abstract

Television in Kinshasa is increasingly monopolized by the Pentecostal ideology. Many *Pasteurs* and prophets have established their own television channels through which they dialogue with their followers and instruct the viewers on the spiritual battle between God and the Devil. On both confessional channels but also on other channels, Kinshasans (inhabitants of Kinshasa) can watch locally produced serials that narrate this same religious ideology. In fact, all the serials made in Kinshasa deal with the same topics, stage the same characters and have the same plotlines, thus partaking in the same genre. I call this genre ‘the Pentecostal Melodrama’ because they are set within the Pentecostal ideology.

In this paper, I will ground a serial within the transformations of matrimonial arrangements in Kinshasa. Youngsters increasingly seek alliance with Pentecostal churches to receive freedom from customary obligations. *Pasteurs* become not only spiritual fathers but also marriage brokers, thus replacing the extended family. The serials themselves are privileged spaces by youngsters to express their own interpretations of their experiences and their expectations for the future, and thus also their opinion on traditional selections of marriage partners. These serials are therefore very close to the lived reality of the young Pentecostals. The questions asked within this paper will be: how do young Pentecostals represent the traditional matrimonial arrangements? And what do they propose as an alternative? How are these meanings modeled and expressed? In which ways do the youngsters create boundaries between themselves and the elder generations, and how are these visualized?

Marriage (Li. *libala*) and motherhood (Li. *bomwasi*) are still the two main goals of young women in Kinshasa. Becoming a wife (Li. *mwasi ya libala*) and a mother (Li. *mama, moboti*) remain the most important accomplishments a woman can and should achieve. *Lokumu ya mwasi na ndako ya libala*, (‘the honor of a woman resides in the house of her marriage’) or *mwasi ebonga na libala* (‘the responsibility of a woman is her marriage’) is said. Unmarried girls do not doubt that one day they will get married, because ‘that is what everybody does’. The main doubts these

young women experience are: with whom will I marry? Will my future husband treat me well and will he make me a respectable wife? Romantic and instrumental notions of love co-exist, but that does not make life hard for these girls. They are more afraid of being forced into a marriage they do not want. Some families still have to perform ‘family duties’, i.e. customary practices that may pose spiritual problems for the well being of the families involved, if certain customary rules are not followed. Youngsters take Pentecostalism as an ally that demonizes these practices and installs new marriage preferences, by which they feel easier to live (cf. De Boeck & Honwana 2005: 1). This alliance between youth and Pentecostalism is increasingly visible in Kinshasa’s *mediascape*.ⁱⁱ In this paper, I will present the case study of *Mamy La Chatte*,ⁱⁱⁱ a member of a theatre company that evangelizes the city through serials. She was faced with the problem of having ‘a husband in the village’ (her *ngatiul*, i.e. a man who owned her since her birth according to traditional matrimonial strategies) and loving the president of her theatre company, the young actors of a local theatre company discussed her case in the serial *Le Feu Dévorant*.

In the final episode of *Le Feu Dévorant*, Paco and Belinda get married in traditional way. During the eleven preceding episodes, Paco, a *homme de Dieu* (man of God, i.e. a man with a specific task within a Neo-Pentecostal church) saw himself posed for the following dilemma: either marrying the girl his parents had chosen for him or the beautiful city girl he already had promised to marry. Parents and his maternal extended family use witchcraft to get their son to follow their rules. These occult practices are countered by constant efforts of Paco’s fellow *bato ya nzambe* (Lingala for ‘men of God’) who pray for him and his family. His colleagues encounter numerous obstacles in their campaign to lead Paco’s family to God’s road. The elders’ occult forces are so strong that in the seventh episode Paco decides to abandon Belinda and accepts the young girl from the village that he had never met before. Very soon Paco’s family witnesses disaster and misfortune. There are quarrels within the extended family and Paco’s father (Makubakuba) loses his sight. Jef, Paco’s friend and a strong spiritual man, succeeds in leading Paco to Jesus’ path and in healing Makubakuba from his blindness through an exorcizing ritual. As a result of this miracle, the old man accepts Jesus and decides that customary marriage practices are demonic. He gives his son the freedom to choose the girl that he wants to marry. The final scene, where Paco and Belinda become man and wife, shows thus the victory of the young Pentecostals upon the elder generations who still follow traditional marriage arrangements.

This summarizes the main plotline of a serial produced and diffused between December 2003 and February 2004 in Kinshasa, capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. *The Devouring Fire* is one of the many serials that are continuously being produced today in this African metropolis. As will become clear throughout this paper, serials in Kinshasa offer a *fun space* where youngsters can criticize the elder generations in a gerontocratic city.^{iv} Important is that these serials are grounded in the ‘raw material’ of the private experiences of the young actors who dig in their personal life histories to create the storylines. The plotline of Paco’s marriage dilemma refers to the problems *Mamy La Chatte*, one of the actresses of the theatre company that produced this serial (Cinarc), is faced with in real life.

I am interested in examining how the making of serials participates in the reconfiguration of power and authority in Kinshasa. New articulations of belonging and identity compete with ‘traditional’ realms of identity attribution based upon the ethnic group. By examining the connection between the serials and the private lives of the actors, this paper provides a larger framework within which to situate the activity of new Christian churches in Kinshasa. Themes addressed in this discussion of mass-mediated representations of matrimonial strategies will include the role of soap operas in the construction of a religious community; urban reconfigurations of gender relations; and Pentecostals’ reconsideration of incest (*Li. ekobo*). The ethnographic material consists of excerpts of the serial *Le Feu Dévorant*, interviews with the actors of the theatre company that produced this serial and observations made during interactions of these actors with their *Pasteur* and their families. These data stem from a fourteen-month fieldwork conducted in Kinshasa between February 2003 and April 2005.^v

II. Studying Kinshasa through serials

Anthropologists are increasingly concerned with the way people represent themselves and others. Media-anthropologists studying visual cultures may not forget that ‘visual representational systems are part of more general cultural processes’ as Morphy and Banks write (1997: 23), thus calling for a continuous zooming in and zooming out on the visual texts that we study. We have to frame these symbolical products within larger analyses of historical and local power relations, and cultural genres that structure/are structured by the society/societies in which they are produced, travel and are consumed. At the same time, the individual, the smallest unit of our

research, should be included within this analysis to indicate how individuals make meaning out of the local and global flows of images, identity formations and particular experiences.

Serials deserve a place in the study of Kinshasa's social formations as most compounds have one or more television set that is switched on from early in the morning until late in the evening. The episodes of the serials are diffused three times a week, so that everyone has the opportunity to see the evolution of the plotline. Often, the actors are invited in weekly talk shows like *théâtre de la cite*, or *personnes et personages* (RTG@) to explain the main message of their serials. During these shows, the actors dialogue with their audience, who, through phone calls, propose adjustments of the storyline, or who venture their own private experiences that are similar to those shown in the serials. These serials become thus public visualizations of collective experiences and occupy a central place in a genuine cultural public sphere.^{vi}

In order to comprehend the role of these serials in Kinshasa, it is necessarily to place these serials within the larger context of production and reception.^{vii} Therefore, I will situate these narratives in the lives of the young actors and in their meetings with their *Pasteur*. As will be illustrated in the ethnographic data that follow, the serials and the debates concerning these stories inform about the social transformations that are directed by Pentecostal churches. The discourse of these churches, both in the semi-private spaces of the religious ritual spaces and in the public spaces of Kinshasa's media, divides the city into Christians and pagans. The recurring theme of purification through exorcizing in the serials suggests that becoming a Christian is the only solution for social and moral change.

An analysis of the power relations within the production of these cultural products is useful because these serials are used to structure social life and impose meaning. The serials are considered to be one of the many symbolical mechanisms through which Pentecostals transform Kinshasa. Anderson's notion of 'imagined communities' (1991) has largely been transposed to media studies and is useful to study the political role of television in Congo. When examining Kinshasa's mediascape and its history, we can trace back three kinds of communities the local media have been involved in creating. For the scope of this paper, I will draw very roughly the main lines of this media history. The first television channel in Kinshasa belonged to Belgian missionaries, who used the television channel in order to civilize and Christianize the population. When Mobutu took power, he changed the name of the television channel, and programs were

created that glorified Mobutu as a God and the father of the Congolese nation. Today, Kinshasa's mediascape creates in first instance an imagined community of new born Christians.

Kinshasa, a city of approximately 7 million inhabitants,^{viii} counts now over twenty local television channels. There is a clear division possible between the two national television channels (RTNC1 and RTNC2) which are captured in the other cities of Congo; private channels as TropicanaTV and RTG@, which are headed by individuals without explicit religious profile; and so-called confessional television channels (RTMV, AmenTV, RTK, etc.) which belong to *Pasteurs* and prophets individually or to religious communities. Important is that on all these television channels the locally produced serials present the same stories, show the same characters and have similar plotlines, thus producing continuously narratives within a genre that I call *the Pentecostal Melodrama*. The concept of 'melodrama' is derived from Peter Brooks' study (1976) of theatre plays written in the 18th and 19th century in France, Germany and Britain. Other symbolic forms like locally produced serials can transmit this genre. The main characteristics of the melodrama are that they talk about average local people (in contrast to mythic creatures or epic heroes), and that all characters and actions are perceived within the larger frame of Good against Evil. This manicheistic framework fits well within the Pentecostal ideology as will be discussed later. Another characteristic is that these stories have a strong moral lesson, which is clearly articulated at the end, i.e. in the last episode of the serial. Lastly, the importance of emotions (both within the storyline as in the reception of the narratives) is an important element in this genre. As the serials are framed within a Pentecostal ideology, I call these serials *Pentecostal Melodramas*, although Kinois refer to these serials as *théâtre populaire* or *maboke*. These latter nouns reveal more about the local origin of the serials than of their content.^{ix}

This content however has changed drastically since the mid 1990s, at a moment that the country as a whole was undergoing fundamental changes. In 1997, Mobutu had to flee the country, as Kabila approached the capital. One of the most important decisions within the field of popular culture was that Mobutu's predecessor opened up Kinshasa's mediascape. Whereas Mobutu had only allowed two national television channels (and later on two private channels, i.e. AA and RagaTV), Kabila made it possible that individuals can set up their own private television channel if they pay 25.000 US\$. His son, Joseph Kabila, has not changed this media policy since he came to power in 2001 after his father was assassinated.

In the midst of the political turmoil mid 1990s, another important structural change came to the fore. *Pasteurs* and self-proclaimed prophets erected new churches that filled up the gap that the state had left. This phenomenon had already started during the seventies, establishing a ‘charismatic revival’ (cf. Fabian 1994: 260). Pentecostalism spread and by the turn of the century, some *Pasteurs* were already wealthy enough to start their own television channel. At that time, the content of the serials, which previously had been produced under the censure of Mobutu, changed and transmitted publicly the Pentecostal message of the spiritual battle between God and the Devil.

Titles of locally produced and broadcasted serials in Kinshasa are *Le Feu Dévorant* (*The Devouring Fire* - by Cinarc-company), *La Vie Africaine* (*The African Life* - by the troupe of Muyombe Gauche), *Bamaman Mozicki* (*Mozicki Women* - Cinarc), *Le Combat Spirituel* (*The Spiritual Battle* - Cinarc), *Le Cartel de l’obscurité* (*The Bond of the Dark World* - Cinarc), *La Vengeance* (*Revenge* - Duo au Théâtre), *Oza ya nini ?* (*Whose are you?* - Simba). They are performed in a mixture of Lingala and French. Depending upon the ethnic origins of the leaders of the troupes, one other ethnic language can be used. The locally produced music can be divided in religious and profane music. A similar categorization of popular theatre in Kinshasa is not valid. All theatre companies producing *maboke*, are closely associated with a religious group. Some of them belong explicitly, as their names show, to a specific church: Cinema-Arc-en-Ciel is affiliated with Montaigne Sainte, Les Evangélistes, La Main de Dieu. Other companies mention the name of their ‘conseiller spirituel’ (spiritual advisor) at the beginning or at the end of the broadcast. The dramatic stories end with the conversion to Jesus and the glorification of his power. And, most of the theatre companies use church compounds to rehearse. For example, the compound where Cinarc-actors rehearse is also the space in which the weekly praying evenings are held. Sans Soucis, a company which does not have explicitly the label of ‘religious theater’, prepares their serials in the vast space of the St Augustinus church, a few kilometres away of Cinarc’s terrain. Even within so-called troupes *ya mokili* (secular theatre), there is a (recent?) trend towards Christianization. As Kadiombo, an actor who was trained in Lubumbashi, but who has resided already for twelve years in Kinshasa, indicates: *non-christian serials do not exist today in Kinshasa*. Thus, there are no profane theatre companies in Kinshasa. In this way, all television channels contribute to the construction of an *imagined Christian community*.

The mushrooming of television channels entailed dynamism in the local production of filmed comedy and drama, and simultaneously encouraged a proliferation of troupes. During Mobutu's reign there were only a few theatre companies that produce serials, 'popular theatre' as they are called in Kinshasa (or: *télédramatiques*). Maboke and Groupe Salongo were the first that could be viewed on national television. They inspired new troupes, which are being created since halfway the nineties. Youngsters, i.e. men and women in their teens and twenties, particularly occupy companies. Whereas politics is foremost discussed in a space dominated by male elders, youngsters use popular culture, both music and theatre, to debate on urban realities. Nevertheless, power within this zone is still held by male elders, as they occupy most important positions within the television channels and often also within the companies.

The production of film is rare in Kinshasa. There are also no companies that produce real soap operas, i.e. long running, unending serials that start with a particular situation and end without a straightforward solution. Nor are there indigenous series (a set of television programmes in which episodes share the same situations and characters but are separate from the others in the series in terms of their plotlines) produced. While at the end of a western soap the crew disperses to create new groups who work on another product, Kinshasa troupes produce exclusively and continuously 'serials', i.e. one history spread over a number of episodes with a definite beginning and end.^x When one history has finished, the next week the shootings for a new history, a new serial, starts while maintaining the same rather stable group of actors.

We focus on the religious theatre group of Cinarc, Cinema-Arc-en-Ciel. Their serials have first been broadcast on TropicanaTV and later on RTG@, two local private channels, which entered Kinshasa's television space since 2001. This move from one channel to another did not change the content of the serials produced. The company is associated with 'La Montaigne Sainte' ('Holy Mountain'), a young Pentecostal church which has its main church in the commune of Kingabwa, but which is trying to expand, in the name of evangelisation. Recently, this church has opened a new branch in Lemba, the commune in which Cinarc is active. The gatherings of the new branch take place in the compound (Fr. *parcelle*, Li. *lopango*) in which the Cinarc-actors rehearse twice a week.

The *troupe* (company) was founded in 1999 by Bienvenu Toukebana (screen name is Caleb). At the time, Bienvenu had just returned from a long stay in Lagos, where he had met some Nigerian actors.^{xi} Intrigued by their films, he had joined them and learned their skills, techniques and

themes. Back in Kinshasa, he tried to set up a theatre company of his own, without much success. Things changed after a dream he had, in which God asked him his help:

God asked me to work for him. He knows that I love television, and he asked me to work as a dramatic artist for him. Through the serials, we can show people the Goodness and the love of God. We also have to indicate people that the Devil is among us. The Devil is the main enemy of God. God loves us, but we may not cooperate with his enemy. The morning after my dream, I started to pray, and there, God showed me the strategies to find good actors. God guides our public performances too. To get inspiration, I pray, and after my praying session, I already know the storyline of that week's episode.^{xii}

Membership of the company is not restricted to geographical or ethnical frontiers. Artists associated with Cinarc live in other cité-districts, and the ethnic heterogeneity of Kinshasa is reflected in ethnic affiliations of the Cinarc-actors. Less than half of the *comédiens* (the actors) have just as Caleb, the founder of the company, ethnic Kongo roots.^{xiii} The different ethnic customs are a major topic of discussion in day-to-day encounters amongst the actors, but the effect on the plotlines is rather minimal. The actors do not utter any preferences towards any ethnic group. Kongo culture is more visible in the serials, since Caleb conceives the scenarios and is also artistically responsible. More important is the religious identity. Since Cinarc is a religious company, Caleb wants all of his members to be new Christians and to attend cults at Montaigne Sainte and the weekly praying gatherings on Thursday evening. Some actors had to convert to the Pentecostal church. Most of them entered the troupe because of family relations with Caleb, or because they pray at the same church, or they reacted to a request of Caleb which was broadcast 1999 and in which he asked for actors willing to assist in evangelisation through serials. None of the actors is married,^{xiv} nor is active in the informal sector, which is surprising. Only two girls earn a living, the others are either studying, or in search for a job and try to get some money via the serials.

Since 2001 until now (February 2006) Cinarc has produced 15 serials^{xv} of which most of the actual actors have appeared in the first ones. Some actors have left and new have joined, but nevertheless the core group is stable. Sometimes there are variations in the fictive family structures (who is married to whom, who is child of whom, and so on) but each actor has its own specificity and finds himself often caught within his or her speciality (the fool, the witch, the adulteress, the yankee, the big boss, the Pasteur).

III. Representing urbanites

The main space in which most scenes of Kinshasa's serials are set is the living room. Private matters of health, spiritual well being, and sexuality are discussed amongst women and their sisters, fellow Christians, and their spiritual leaders. It is also the space which witches (Li. Sg. *Ndoki*) and the Devil (Li. *Satani*) try to enter, in order to create disorder and chaos (Li. *mubulu*). In the configuration of actions and characters and their representations, the young producers articulate the distinctions between their Christian urban community and others, i.e. non-Christians and villagers. The first distinction sets boundaries between villagers (Li. Sg. *mouta, mbokartier*) and urbanites (*Kinois* or Li. Sg. *mwana mboka mundele*, inhabitants of the village of the white). In the Congolese imaginary, the city is an ambivalent space, as the city entails promises for a better future but at the same moment it is a realm of moral decay (cf. De Boeck 2004, Devisch 1995). Village people were and are still attracted to the promise of modernity, or better, the promises of cosmopolitanism. In the colonial imaginary, a powerful concept originated that still today captivates the specificity of the life style of young urban Africans: *la Kinoiserie*. Non-Kinois, i.e. Congolese living in other urban centers in the country display an ambiguous attitude towards the capital city. The *Kinoiserie* attracts them but they despise it at the same time. The discourse of *la Kinoiserie* and its atmosphere of *ambiance* combines ambivalent approaches towards the 'call of the city'. Bars, modern Congolese music, and so-called free women are the vital points on which this *ambiance* atmosphere is based. Kinshasa's young inhabitants however proudly use this concept in the following sense (as explained to me by a young Muluba-man, born and raised in Kinshasa (24 years at the time) :

La kinoiserie is the way of living according to the rhythm of Kinshasa. One forgets about customs, and tries to model him towards foreign cultures. Clothes are very important for this life style. We like the latest fashions, as the Jamaican style or the clothes of American singers. Today, parents complain that their daughters refuse to wear pagnes (Li. liputa). They also regret that the young Kinois do not have any respect anymore for their parents. Discipline is a problem: we do not have work, but our parents urge us to find money. As we do not have a job, we listen to music and practise the latest dances.(Ada, Ngaba, quartier Molo, 21/11/2003).

Music and clothing become the main elements of *la kinoiserie*, which is articulated in the bars and the streets, creating an ‘ambiance’ atmosphere (see Biaya 1996, White 2002).^{xvi} This leads to a sense of superiority from the urbanites vis-à-vis the village people. Villages are perceived as ‘backward’ and not knowing how to behave in an elegant style. A scene of *Le Feu Dévorant* where Paco teaches his fiancé from the village how to behave is representative for this boundary setting between the city and the village, the first being the space of modernity and the second one of tradition, which is to be mocked with. Men wearing shorts or women dressed in torn pagnes are laughed at by Kinois and are depicted as ‘villagers’. In the serial, as Paco has decided to marry his *ketiul* (Yansi-word for the girl that is his preferred spouse),^{xvii} he teaches her to behave like a good and respectable city woman. This entails a new laughing manner (‘a woman should laugh with pride’), he shows her how to sit on a chair, and asks his sister to teach her how to dress properly.

Pentecostalism crosses this boundary between villagers and urbanites with the opposition between Christians and pagans. Pentecostals display an ambivalent attitude towards ‘the world’. They divide the universe into a sacred realm (the divine) and a realm governed by the devil. The latter is equated by Kinois Pentecostals as *le monde* (the world). Non religious music / secular music is seen as ‘*banzembo ya mokili*’ (songs of the world, *la musique mondaine*). Those who are not reborn, or who lead a sinful life are called to be *dans le monde* (in the world). At conversion (spiritual or physical baptism), a reborn Christian states to retract himself/herself out of the world. He/she does not belong any more to the world, and flees bars, hotels, or other ‘worldly places’. ‘To be in the world’ is equated with behaving badly, committing sinful acts as having sexual relationships outside of wedlock, dancing non Christian dances, not controlling one’s emotions (having a bad temper for example), and engaging in violent acts (shouting, fighting). All these practices are perceived either as glorifications of the devil or as strategies of the devil to enter into households and destruct matrimonial harmony. An important scene in this regard is the scene in which Paco’s parents want to learn their son’s *ketiul* “how to be with a man”. In line with Congolese associations between dance and sexuality, Paco’s parents invite their son’s *ketiul* to show them how she dances a traditional Yanzi dance. It does not take long for the elders to participate in the dance during which the viewer sees how through special effects spirits enter in these dancing bodies. For Kinois, these special effects are known methods to show how the occult invisible, i.e. the realm of the Devil, pervades in the visible realm of reality. The *trucage*

shows how spirits (Li. Sg. *elimo ya zabulu*) enter into the bodies, thus rendering the process of bewitchment visible. Here, a clear association between ancestors (Li. *bankoko*) and demoniac activities is present, as these traditional dances are normally performed to glorify the ancestors. At the moment that Paco and his friends arrive in his house, they witness this ‘pagan’ scene. Their faces show terror and disgust, as the traditional music and the accompanying dance are for them glorifications of the Devil. The *hommes de Dieu* turn out the music, start clapping in their hands, point their arms to the three pagans and shout out loud ‘au nom de Jésus’. As such, they chase away the bad spirits that the ancestors are considered to be according to Pentecostal thoughts. Village people are believed to be very much engaged in witchcraft too, and most Kinois youngsters display an ambivalent attitude towards ‘their village’, as they call the ground of their ancestors:

“In the village, your aunt can invite you to have dinner, but in fact, she will put something in your food, because she will want you to leave your money over there. We are Christians, and we do not have to fear anything if we keep on praying. One day, I want to visit my ancestors, but I know that I will have to pray very hard if I make the visit.” (Dinghi, Cinarc-actor, 20 December 2003)

These strategies of including and excluding people from the Christian community invade also in the personal life of the actors. As already mentioned above, the young actors had specific intentions in the production of *Le Feu Dévorant*. Whilst all the serials produced are intended to convert non-Christians and to show Kinois the strategies of the devil, this particular serial addressed the extended family of one of their actresses. This case will now be discussed as an example of the marriage politics of Pentecostal churches.

Mamy La Chatte

Mamy La Chatte is a young girl in her mid-twenties. Her name derives from the first role she played with the theatre company Cinarc (‘Cinema-Arc-en-Ciel’). In the first serial produced by this troupe, “Mambweni ou le Cartel de l’Obscurité”, she incarnated the role of a young girl that was bewitched by her grandmother. During the night, this young girl transformed herself in a black cat. In the following serials produced by this troupe, the actress kept this screen name. Whether she played the role of *Maman Pasteur* or of a young prostitute, she is always addressed in the serials as *Mamy La Chatte*. She entered the theatre company in 1998, after seeing an

announcement on some of the local television channels where Caleb, the president of the troupe, asked for actors to cooperate with him in the evangelization of the city through serials. When entering the company, she had just gone back to Christianity. She indicates that, although she is raised by catholic Christian parents, in her late teenage years she had fallen victim of the call of the city, meaning that she had sexual relationships with men, that she drank alcohol, performed 'worldly dances' and dressed like 'free women'. In 1998, she erupted her love affair with her boyfriend and became a reborn Christian, because she felt that 'she had been ignoring God and it was time to lead a life like a respectful girl'. It meant that she had to be baptized again, a ritual she did in the church *Montaigne Sainte*, the Neo-Pentecostal church affiliated with the theatre company.

She is one of the most impressive actresses of the troupe. The other girls in the troupe often envy her for her beautiful clothes, her wonderful figure, and the network she is in through the hosting of a music program on RTG@ that invites religious singers and orchestras. Furthermore, she seems to be in a privileged position of the troupe: she can arrive late on the Thursday prayer gatherings, she can suddenly leave the shootings if she receives a phone call and the president of the troupe never seems to mind. A year after my initial entrance in the troupe, it became clear that she was romantically involved with the president. Their love history was not that fine romantic story Kinois see when they watch American films. They were a couple for about three years, since the early days of the troupe until a year before my first arrival in Kinshasa. Both were seeing other people during my first extensive period with the troupe. During my absence however, the two had got back together. As Caleb and his family moved to a district closer to the compound of Mamy's parents, she took up the tasks of 'fiancée' (Li. *mobandi*), i.e. each morning she would come to the house of Caleb who would give her money to buy food at the market. She would prepare the meal of Caleb whilst his sisters, Sylvie and Jupsie, prepared for the others in the household and the actors and actresses that would come in hungry. This practice indicated publicly that she 'cooked for him' (Li. *kolambela molongani na ye*), thus that she accepted to be his wife and as he ate her food, that he wanted to have her as his wife. It might seem as if the couple was already established and that they had wonderful future waiting for them: the president would marry one of the main stars of his troupe and they would live a long and happy life. According to customs (Li. *bacoutumes, biloko ya bobiso*) both in the village and in towns, girls usually cook at the home for the boy, so that he gets used to her cooking skills, and his mother

can give him advice about how she should handle her son. As such, this period is regarded as ‘an internship’ (a stage). If the boy does not like her cooking or she does not get along with his mother, sometimes the engagement is cancelled. There was however one problem in the relationship between Mamy and Caleb: although Mamy performed the practices of an engaged woman, a woman soon to become someone’s wife, the ritual of presenting the man to the girl’s family had not yet happened (Li. *kokanga lopango*). They acted as an engaged couple, although the young man had not yet asked in an official way the acceptance of her family. Their social unaccepted behavior raised no public questions as secrecy and discretion are some of Kinois’ main strategies in dealing with love affairs.^{xviii} Many of my attempts to talk about their relationship, their feelings and their prospects for their relationship were blocked for reasons that only gradually came clear to me as other Cinarc-members talked to me in set-apart settings about their president and his girlfriend. None of the Cinarc-members approved of their boss’s behavior, but none had the power to talk about it – none but Sylvie, the elder sister of Mamy, and also a leading actress of the troupe. She only raised her voice and talked once in public about this relationship. It was at a moment where many of the troupe began to notice that Mamy not only cooked but also slept in the house of Caleb. Hardly any one talked about it in public, until Sylvie said one Monday afternoon whilst half of the theatre company was present: “Caleb, you have to be careful. One day, our mother can pass by and if she will see that Mamy is present, you will never marry her.”^{xix} Apparently, Mamy had fled her parents’ house in Lemba Righini because they wanted her to marry a *mikiliste*.^{xx} As her parents insisted on her accepting his invitation to go to London, she left the house telling that she would spend three months with a maternal aunt in Yolo (a neighborhood in a the community of Limete). In reality, she moved to Caleb’s house only 15 minutes away by foot from her parents’ house. Things became even more complicated when Mamy spoke of an ‘unknown man in the village owning her’. According to Bayanzi-rules a girl is owned by her maternal grandfather – or the young men of his own lineage to whom he has ceded the rights upon this girl. Mamy was thus faced with a problem of multiple marriage candidates: her owner in the village, the man in London, and Caleb, the man she said she loved. It is striking that the third man, the *mikiliste*, was not discussed in the serials nor in the talks I had with Mamy during the shooting of that serial. The man in the village was a more important topic in the serial and in the discourse of the actors. Dinghi, one of the male leaders of the troupe explained their intentions for shooting *The Devouring Fire* as follows:

“Evangelizing the city means that we have to show people how the Devil works. Sometimes, our parents want us to follow certain rules, but they do not know that they are doing what the Devil wants. We have to show them that certain ancient practices from the village are in fact pagan matters. Mamy is lucky that her parents have become reborn Christians. They do not force her to marry this man in the village. But, there are numerous others young women and men who follow the will of their elders. We have to reveal that these are the Devil’s works.” (Dinghi, 20 December 2003)

IV. Traditional marriage practices in Kinshasa

Through her mother Mamy belongs to the Bayanzi-community who practices two different matrimonial strategies (Hochegger 1970: 35-72) Firstly, there is the preferential marriage of a man with his *ketiul*, which is the granddaughter of his mother’s maternal uncle. He is called the *ngatiul* of the young girl, ‘the owner of the girl’. This marriage strategy is called *ukwel a ketiul* and will be discussed below. Secondly, there is the marriage with matrimonial services and exchange of gifts that go to the family of the bride, who goes to reside with the family of her husband (*ukwel e nzim*). At birth, every girl and man in the Bayanzi group have one or more *ngatiuls* or *ketiuls*. Marriage to these preferred partners is not obligatory, nevertheless, lest another marriage candidate should arrive, he has to pay bride wealth to the *ngatiul* of the young girl. The Yanzi maternal grandfather owns his granddaughter because she is a reincarnation of his wife. Through his possession of the granddaughter, two generations later he brings back a girl into his family, who had to pay for his own marriage. The grandfather resides of his right to marry his granddaughter and transmits them to (ideally) the son of his sister’s son, or to any other marriageable men of his lineage. The bride price (Li. *likonza*, Fr. *La dot*) that he as a maternal uncle has to gather for the young men he is responsible for comes back in this way because he has to receive the bride price of the young girl he owns. “Owning” entails plights as providing food, clothes, paying all kinds of services to the parents of the girl, but also the right of marrying her. He does not have to pay any bride price however. Traditional Yanzi-rules accept also that a girl marries another man than her *ngatuil*. Then, general marriage practices are effectuated: there is a presentation of the ‘fiancé’ and a marriage ritual. The man pays the bride price not to her parents but to her *ngatuil*. He also reimburses the costs the *ngatuil* has spent for his *ketiul* (school fees, medicine, clothes, etc.). He ‘buys’ or ‘frees’ her from her owner, it is said. As such, every

Yanzi-girl has one or more *ngatiul* since her birth, just as all Yanzi-men have potential young women out of which they can chose to marry without having to gather a bride price.

Since six years, Mamy has been a reborn Christian and for about four years she is actively engaged in the evangelisation of Kinshasa through the production of Pentecostal serials. As a muyanzi girl, already since her birth, Mamy has belonged to a *ngatiul*. The existence of this man 'who owes her' came as a surprise a few years before, at the traditional marriage ceremony of her eldest sister, Kiki. She tells the following about this event that took place during the marriage ritual in Kinshasa:

“When all the gifts and the money were handed over to our family, suddenly a man sitting amongst our relatives stood up and spoke out loud: ma femme ne part pas (my wife will not leave). He said that he was her ngatiul and he demanded money. If not, he would block the marriage. Everybody was surprised, because our parents and their brothers had not thought about this practice. But apparently, he did own her.”

At first, the *ngatiul* of Kiki demanded 700\$. Both families negotiated on the spot and were able to bring the amount down to 140\$. Daily problems of food, transport, and other issues bring those kinds of practices apparently to the background in an urban setting. Mamy talks about her *ngatiul* in a rather neutral way. She does not fear that her parents will oblige her to marry him, as her parents have converted to Pentecostalism two years before. Nevertheless, her *ngatiul* is real and does not disappear with conversion. All newborn Christians recognize the mystical impact of ethnic rules and try to get out of it without offending them. “My husband will have to pay to my *ngatiul* for me. If he does not, then we might encounter problems in our household”, Mamy says. These problems range from infertility, incessant matrimonial disputes, to financial problems and loss of material goods.

V. The intervention of the church

In an increasing manner, the churches and their Pentecostal spiritual leaders present themselves as norm-setters and value-givers. In sermons, public debates on television, preaching sessions in public transport, and political discussions, the *bato ya Nzambe* (the men of God) define the postcolonial reality with its political instability and social crisis within religious terms, and

present themselves and their rituals as the sole mediators for amelioration. Both public and private difficulties are interpreted within the overall frame of the spiritual battle.

In the sixth episode of the serial *Le Feu Dévorant*, Paco's parents try to convince him to marry his *ketiul*. They offer him 900 US\$ to rent a luxurious apartment in the city center. The young Christian man refuses whilst shouting out: *eza ekobo. Nakobala ye te. Eglise na ngai endima te. Eza ekobo.* (This is incest. I will not marry her. My church does not allow me to marry her. It's incest.). His refusal is based upon the authority of his church that proclaims these practices as incestuous, and his words reflect the fission between generations in the city. This is expressed in the seventh episode of *Le Feu Dévorant*, where Julien, a strong spiritual leader, complains: *toza Chrétien, mais baboti na biso baza te* (we are Christians, but our parents are not). Immediately, the kinship system offered by ethnic identity strategies competes with a spiritual kinship. Belonging is no longer solely based upon the idiom of consanguinity but also of religious identification as the church groups create a new space of identity generating. The *Pasteur* and his wife are considered to be spiritual parents and the fellow believers are called *frères et soeurs en Christ* (brothers and sisters of Christ). They are all gathered in a community of *children of God* (Li. *bana ya Nzambe*). These religious groups often fill in a void experienced by youngsters who have become orphans, live in different families, or who are abandoned by their parents who have left for the West or still remain in the village. *Pasteurs* promise stability, wealth, health and an identity in a society where extended families are only present when they acclaim their share in the prosperity of the descendants and no longer perform their duties for the members of the lineage. In their sermons (Li. *mateya*), the *Pasteurs* stress the limitations of the family and represent the Christian group as a realm of possibilities:

“If your father was a carpenter, then you would become a carpenter too. Thanks to Jesus, if your father was a carpenter, you are no longer obliged to become a carpenter too. Jesus makes it possible that you can become a PDG, or a minister, or even a successful homme d'affaires. Jesus gives everybody the possibility to make one's own name, no matter who your parents are.”
(Pasteur Flavien, one of the troupe's spiritual advisors, 9 February 2005)

The promises of Christianity are only realized when the Christians perform Christian behavior, i.e. *walk with Jesus* (Li. *kotambola na Jesus*). Following Jesus' path entails also marrying

Christians. The impact of Pentecostal leaders in marriage arrangements cannot be overlooked. *Pasteurs* and prophets replace the family responsible of the youngsters as these ask advice concerning sexual matters, the choice of a marriage partner. Sometimes even the search of this marriage partner is done by the *Pasteur* or within the community of Christians.^{xxi} This is an excerpt of my field notes of a sermon given by Pasteur Gervais, the spiritual leader of the theatre company Cinarc:

Pasteur Gervais takes the microphone and starts talking as soon as the clapping of the hands has diminished. With his high-pitched voice, he asks us to repeat 'Votre Pasteur sait arranger des choses.' (Your *Pasteur* can arrange things). *We all repeat this sentence up to three times. Then he starts to explain this utterance. He tells us that last Sunday, after the weekly cult, one of the young girls of the church community had asked him to speak in private with him. She had a problème de luxe, as he says jokingly. It appeared that the girl was asked by three young men to become their wife. She had no idea who to choose and asked her spiritual leader his advice. He told us he had advised her not to take a look at their clothes, nor at their cars, nor at their diplomas or frequent travels back and forth between Kinshasa and South Africa. Instead, she should investigate if the men prayed, were real Christians, and then she should ask God for help. Whilst praying, God would indicate her whom to choose, because Dieu a des projets avec vous (because God has plans with you). Everybody claps their hands and starts waving at the Pasteur. As the orchestra starts the music, the Pasteur smiles and invites us to dance for God.* (Field notes, March 21, 2004).

Christians tend to marry endogamous, i.e. within the newborn Christian community. When a catholic man courts a newborn Christian girl, often, the man enters into the Pentecostal church. If one person is not a reborn Christian, the other will either decline the marriage process or convince the pagan of becoming a Christian. Then, they start spiritual lessons that normally take place within the church community of the young girl. The young man goes to the church of the young girl to take her away. Sometimes he becomes a member. Sometimes however it occurs that the young girl follows her lover to the church, when he is member of a church with a famous *Pasteur*. Taking the traditional rules of exogamy in consideration, it seems that the new churches have added other interdictions concerning the choice of marriage partners. The couples still perform the traditional marriage ceremonies performed in the *lopango* (compound) of the bride

where the bride price is handed over from the groom's family to the bride's family and speeches by the *likonzi*, the responsables of both family groups, are exchanged. This ritual however is always – sometimes a day later, sometimes months later - followed by a ritual of religious marriage taking place in the church, in which the *Pasteur* takes on the leading role.

In the Pentecostal discourse, *Pasteurs* denounce traditional practices as demoniac and reinterpret the notion of incest. Ethnic groups have their own rules that indicate who to marry and with whom they can not have sexual relationships. These rules still prevail in Kinshasa, as trespassing these taboos are often followed by mystical punishments as death, infertility, disease or other kinds of bad luck. Therefore, before actually presenting oneself to the families, the man and the woman have to inform their families about the identity of the person they want to marry so that the families can do their investigations concerning traditional prescriptions. Warnings concerning marrying too fast without performing these investigations were made in the serial *Makila ya nani?* (Whose blood?), a serial produced by the theatre company Sans Soucis in 2004. The story shows a young man and girl (both of Kongo ethnic background) who met in the church and decided to get married. Only after their marriage, they learned that they were consanguinal affines, belonging to the same ethnic group.

When coming back to the fictive case of Paco and his *ketiul*, or the lived case of Mamy, we notice that there are two distinct interpretations of 'incest'. For the Bayansi group, marrying one's *ketiul* is not considered to be incestuous because the descent is only reckoned within one line, the maternal line. As such, the maternal grandfather and the children of his sister belong to the same bloodline, but his granddaughter does not. In such a way, this girl can marry the men from the matrilineal descent line of her grandfather. Pentecostals however recognize a double lineal descent line, thus encompassing both 'traditional blood relatives' and also those who traditionally did not belong to the same family. The churches have reinterpreted the meaning of incest and enlarged it. The Lingala word *ekobo* that is used in the churches and in the serials to indicate incest also refers to adultery, pornography and prostitution. The notion of incest is thus expanded to sexual relations outside of wedlock and not any more to a specific group of persons with whom an individual cannot have sexual intercourse (nuclear family, classificatory sisters, etc.).

VI. Conclusion

The popularity of *maboke*, due to their closeness to the lived daily reality and their instructive content, turns Kinshasa's serials into intriguing focal points to study power relations in domestic spaces and competing mechanisms of identity construction. The similarity of the discourses of youngsters and Pentecostal *Pasteurs* offered in this paper, demonstrates the 'generation trouble' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 20) in today's Kinshasa. Mass media plays an important role in it, as the zone of popular culture seems to be monopolized by youngsters. The serials have become a medium for public expression for the complaints of youngsters and their options for a better future.

At the same time, these serials articulate – in line with the other Pentecostal genres as sermons, religious songs, and public testimonies of former witches – how to become real Christians, marrying Christians being one of the main strategies in this endeavor. Pentecostalism aids youngsters by enlarging the concept of 'incest', thus incorporating traditional marriage preferences. The material is thus interesting to see how a culturally charged concept of 'incest' gains new content within new configurations of power. Spiritual leaders compete with the ethnic group for the 'souls' of the young. These new figures of authority are eagerly embraced by the young, for whom Pentecostalism broadens their agency. This westerly inspired religion gives rise to new forms of individual creativity, offering alternative spaces to construct identities.

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ⁱ This is a Kiyansi word (Bayansi, see footnote 17) that designates the person who according to customary law owns a woman and can therefore marry her. He is her *ngatiul* and she is his *ketiul*. There are plural ways of writing these terms: *ngatjul*, *ketjul*, *kitjul*, ... I follow the orthography of my informants.

ⁱⁱ Appadurai defines *mediascape* as "both the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and . . . the images of the world created by these media" (Appadurai, 1996: 35).

ⁱⁱⁱ Using real names or pseudonyms has been a major concern for me. I have decided to use the fictive names whenever I refer to the storylines of the serials, and the real names of the actors when referring to their private lives. For others not engaged within the theatre company, I have created pseudonyms. My choice for keeping the real names of the actors is based upon the public identity of the actors within the city itself: whenever they are invited in public shows or spectacles, both their names (real and fictive) are mentioned. They are thus real public figures. The same goes for the *Pasteurs*.

^{iv} I borrow the concept of 'fun space' from Pnina Werbner (1996) who identified amongst the Pakistani diasporic community in Manchester marriage rituals and popular culture as sports and mass media as gendered fun spaces, i.e. *marked by gaiety, humour, music, and dance*, and isolated from the diasporic Pakistani communal public sphere occupied by elder men.

^v Fieldwork was done in February-March 2003, October 2003-April 2004 and October 2004-April 2005. I prospected the field of popular theatre, and worked initially with a few theatre companies. Gradually, I worked intensively as a participant observer with one theatre company.

^{vi} The notion of the 'cultural public sphere' stems from McGuigan 2002.

^{vii} There seems to be no real distinction between production and consumption concerning the serials in Kinshasa. Stuart Hall's call for dropping this distinction is then very much welcomed by my data.

^{viii} There is no exact number of the population. Between December 2004-February 2005, there has been a census, but the official data have not yet been published. The amount of 7 million inhabitants is a widely assumed number.

^{ix} The serials grew out of the theatre plays that were diffused on television. In 1980, the actors of the theatre company *Groupe Salongo* started to film outside. The name of the first serial produced in Kinshasa is *mwana nsosu* (little chicken) and shows the whereabouts of a young man (a gigolo) who has a sexual relationship with an elder married woman. This theme is very much present in Kinshasa's popular culture.

^x Based upon the categorization by Selby and Cowdery 1995 *How to Study Television*.

^{xi} The Nigerian witchcraft films that are widely consumed in Kinshasa heavily inspire the serials.

^{xii} This is my translation of his words in French. He prepares each week the storyline of one episode. The audience (unknown fans, or relatives) and the actors may propose changes in the main plot or in the representation of the characters.

^{xiii} 40% of Kinshasa's population belongs to the Kongo group.

^{xiv} In March, a married woman entered the company. She is not a real member of the troupe, but she appears from time to time on the screen. Her house, situated in Lemba Salongo, operates as a social space for the actors when filming in this quarter. Out of gratitude, Caleb gives her from time to time cameo-roles. The actors associated with Cinarc are requested not to have sexual relationships. As soon as a girl is pregnant, or an actor has impregnated a girl, they are asked to quit.

^{xv} The fifteen serials are 'Mambweni. Le cartel de l'obscurité' (Mambweni, the pact of the obscure world) (7 episodes), Les ruses du Diable (10), Ekonda. Le quartier maudit (Ekonda, the cursed quarter) (12), Le temps de la fin (the final epoch) (10), L'ombre de la mort (the shadow of death) (6), Affaire ya diamant (diamant affairs) (12), Combat spirituel (the spiritual battle) (12), Le feu dévorant (the devastating fire) (11), Bamaman Moziki (the Mozicki Women) (4), Caroline et Poupette (Caroline and Poupette) (3), Retour au bercail (back to the homestead)

(4), Le Couloir Dangereux (the dangerous corridor) (8), Le Tombeau Ouvert (the open tomb) (12), Les Nanas Benz (14), Les Marquisards (now still being produced).

^{xvi} Biaya notes: *dans la pensée populaire, l'indépendance a pris la connotation de repos, de confort, petit bourgeois et de remplacement des blancs par les noirs; l'idéal postcolonial des elites et des jeunes se mue en devenir 'ambianceur'. Tout au moins vivre en ville prend le sens de "faire l'ambiance", partir à la ville, c'est "s'ambiancer" pour le paysan* (1996: 349-350).

^{xvii} The Bayansi constitute of an ethnic group in the province of Bandundu, northeast of Kinshasa.

^{xviii} Hence also the importance of rumors, which are informal ways of diffusing knowledge.

^{xix} Bienvenu; keba. Ata ndele, maman na biso akoya. Soki azomona Carine awa, bokobala te.

^{xx} A *mikiliste* is a Congolese who resides in the West. *Mikili* is slang Lingala for heaven and Europe.

^{xxi} Van Dijk (2004) discusses the role of religious leaders in marriage arrangements both in Ghana and in the Ghanaian diaspora in Southern Africa and in Europe. Laurent (2003) discusses the marriage practices amongst Mossi Pentecostals in Burkina Faso.